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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted of the effectiveness of marriage counseling with respect to marital status and the long-term stability of relationships. Data were gathered from clients of approved Australian marriage counseling agencies (n=540) who took a pre-counseling survey during a 4-week period in October-November 1987 and a post-counseling survey 8 months later. To determine effectiveness, the study concentrated on the following outcomes: change in relationship status; change in level of commitment to relationship; satisfaction with counseling; and improvement in problem area, personal life, and viability of relationship. This book reports in detail the findings of this study. After an executive summary and introduction, part 1 provides an overview of marriage counseling in Australia, with chapters on: (1) the role of government in providing counseling services; (2) the role of marriage counseling agencies; (3) a definition of marriage counseling; (4) a review of the literature on the effectiveness of marriage counseling; and (5) the demographies of the users of marriage counseling. Part 2 delineates the pre-counseling survey results, including research design, procedures, and response rates; characteristics of participants; why clients came to counseling; expectations of counseling; and pathways to marriage counseling. Part 3 likewise delineates the post-counseling survey results, with chapters on the effectiveness of marriage counseling, client satisfaction, counseling outcomes, predictors of perceived counseling effectiveness, assistance from counseling, number and type of interviews, and perception of marriage counseling services. Part 4 discusses the cost-benefits of marriage counseling, while part 5 concludes the study with implications for policy, government departments, and marriage counseling agencies. References are included and instrumentation is appended. (TE)

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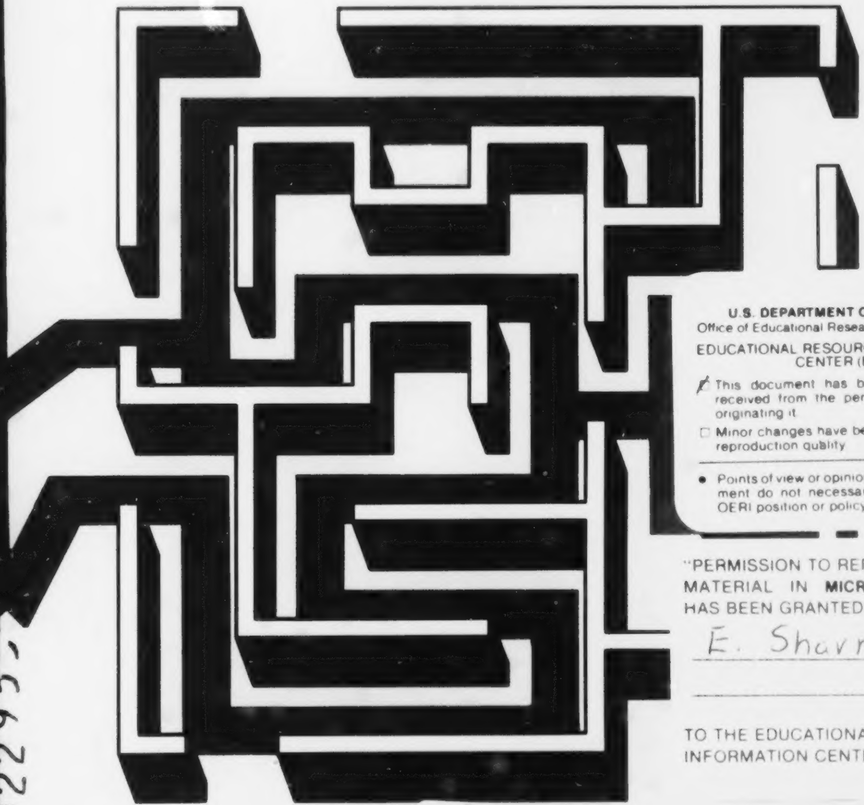
MARRIAGE COUNSELLING IN AUSTRALIA

AN EVALUATION



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MARRIAGE COUNSELLING IN AUSTRALIA

AN EVALUATION

Ilene Wolcott and Helen Glezer

Australian Institute of Family Studies
Monograph No. 8

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Australian Institute of Family Studies
300 Queen Street
Melbourne 3000 Australia
Telephone (03) 608 6888

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FOREWORD

When the Australian Institute of Family Studies was set up in 1980, I was asked, as Foundation Director, whether we would develop training programs for marriage educators, marriage and family counsellors, family therapists and the wide range of other professional 'family' service workers. My response in the negative was based on two main reasons.

The first was that the new Institute should use its very limited resources to do research on families rather than to duplicate courses already being run in many tertiary education institutions. We were to have a public education role, not a specific training role. Secondly, we could not really comment on or advise about marriage counselling or other family support services until we had sufficient information about family life itself and the changes taking place in Australia. The research database was too thin for us to be in any position to say what was valuable or what might help improve 'marital and family stability'.

So the Institute's initial Research Plan laid out a series of studies on family formation, children, divorce and family reformation to be done well before any evaluation of specific family services. Then the full resources of the Institute were to be devoted in the fifth year to studies of human relationships education, marriage education, marriage counselling and other family support services.

That plan, needless to say, was greatly modified over the years, but its rationale proved to be sound. Our national family formation study identified significant shifts in the patterns of youth-to-adult transition which affected the nature of marriage. Retention in education, prolonged financial dependence, greater sexual freedom, the assertion of women's rights, delayed marriage, delayed and decreased fertility and the movement of married women into the paid labour force, all had implications for the construction of modern marriage, the nature of sex roles, the management of companionship, conflict, work and family responsibilities.

Our early studies of divorce and the impact of divorce on children revealed much about the 'images' of marriage that people held dear, what changed expectations there were, the structural difficulties people were experiencing in sustaining satisfactory relationships. Our studies of economic and policy impacts on families added to our view that marriage education and marriage counselling had to be seen as just one part of a positive approach to improving the quality of family life. Certainly, the ability to communicate, to show affection, to be tolerant, to handle conflict in a constructive way when it arose, to express one's own needs and feelings were important factors in sustaining a viable relationship; but so too were having a roof over your head, an adequate job and income, access to child care and other support services when needed.

In sum, counselling has to be seen within the wider ecology of social forces affecting relationships within a family. A major correlate of marital and family disruption is isolation of the family unit from networks of supportive kin, friends, neighbours and accessible support services. So it is likely that marriage counselling, a self-determined form of intervention that comes, often, well down the track to breakdown of the relationship, will be most effective if and where other networks of support are available and operating.

In designing this evaluation study, the Institute was very aware of the need to compare relative effectiveness in different settings, to have some sort of 'control' group of those who did not use formal marriage counselling services to sort through their difficulties. As always, of course, financial and staff resources prevented such an ideal design from being realised. Nevertheless, we were able to ensure that the study was longitudinal, with an eight-month follow-up survey, rather than one which only asked about satisfaction and effectiveness at the time when counselling was completed. We also built into the design questions about other sources of advice and help, about pressures beyond the marriage such as work factors and financial troubles, and those essential comparisons between men and women, those with and without children, differing levels of education, income and social status.

So the study does go beyond much of the extant research literature on the effectiveness of marriage counselling. It enables us to say with some surety who is 'helped' beyond the short-term 'Hawthorne Effect' of experiencing a sympathetic professional ear. It also enables us to estimate, on a broad and conservative basis, the cost-benefits to government of providing financial support to approved marriage counselling agencies, though a cost-effectiveness analysis was not asked for in the original brief from the Attorney-General.

The study focuses even more upon the social and personal benefits of marriage counselling, benefits that are difficult to quantify but represent huge gains in terms of the psychological, physical and long-term harm that can flow from conflicts badly handled. Even where counselling does not lead to reconciliation, there can be personal growth and improvement in the quality of later relationships. We felt it important to counter the tendency to see value only in terms of dollars saved and to evaluate 'effectiveness' on a wider range of factors.

In this light, the findings of the study show marriage counselling in a very positive light. The large majority of both men and women have their expectations met, are satisfied with the outcomes, assess the counselling itself as effective. Many marriages improve in quality, couples who may have separated stay together and have an enhanced capacity to cope positively with their problems. Sense of self-worth improves, often despite a subsequent separation.

But perhaps the more important findings of this study are those which might be seen as the negative evaluations of counselling. There are significant groups of clients who were not happy with either the process or the outcomes of marriage counselling. Those, especially men, whose partnerships ended and where no reconciliation was effected, are less satisfied. Some, both men and women, report that counselling was not sufficiently focused or skill oriented to enable them to cope more effectively. Women overall are more positive than men about the experience and the analysis shows that a combination of 'commitment' to sustaining the marriage and 'pessimism' about the chances of this happening is a recipe for great dissatisfaction on the part of men.

The authors of the report tease out the significance of these findings for future directions in marriage counselling. One of the most interesting implications is that the 'language' of counselling is better suited to women than to men and needs to be rethought. Women, it seems, have discussed their relationship problems widely with others before coming to counselling. They understand the language of self-disclosure and feel less uncomfortable about it than men. This does not mean that men are necessarily hopeless communicators or less insightful about self, though there is plenty of evidence that this is so. In some cases, wives have talked in detail to others, but not to their husbands who are shocked to find the 'uncoupling' process has already proceeded so far in the minds of their wives that counselling becomes a sort of ritual justification for ending the marriage.

What is suggested by such findings is a need for marriage counselling to be rethought in terms of how it deals with men compared with women. Can earlier forms of advice be developed? Should more male counsellors be trained? Would separate, more frequent sessions for men be preferable to allow some 'catching up' on the language and the nature of counselling itself be desirable? Would group sessions at times be more acceptable/effective than couple only counselling? Certain dogmas about what is or is not marriage counselling have emerged which may be challenged by the findings of this study. No sudden revisions are called for, but a pragmatic rethinking in the light of the experiences people report in this study.

The Marriage Counselling Evaluation Study was requested by the Hon. Lionel Bowen, Attorney-General, in his capacity as Minister responsible for the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The Board of Management agreed to the request but, because no additional funds were available, the study was delayed until staff and money became available. We are very grateful to the approved marriage counselling agencies and their peak bodies for their cooperation with this study; to the Marriage Counselling Section of the Attorney-General's Department for their assistance in design and access to administrative data, to members of the Steering Committee and, of course, to the many men and women clients who agreed to participate.

My congratulations go to the authors, Institute researchers Ilene Wolcott and Helen Glezer, for successfully bringing to a conclusion what proved to be a complex task of both organisation and analysis.

Don Edgar
Director
Australian Institute of Family Studies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In January 1986, the Attorney-General requested the Australian Institute of Family Studies to conduct a study to measure the effectiveness of marriage counselling. The brief stated the study was to look at 'the effect of marriage counselling on marital status and the long-term stability of relationships'. The study design incorporates components that enable some assessment of direct and indirect cost savings to the community. However, the study was not intended to measure the cost-effectiveness of marriage counselling services provided in the approved agencies in comparison with other counselling and family support services in the community.

Aims of marriage counselling

The aims of marriage counselling as defined in the *Family Law Amendment Act 1983* include the counselling of a person in relation to:

(a) entering into marriage;
(b) reconciliation of the parties to a marriage;
(c) separation of the parties to a marriage;
(d) the dissolution or annulment of a marriage; or
(e) adjusting to the dissolution or annulment of a marriage, whether that counselling is provided in relation to the proposed marriage, marriage, or former marriage of that person or in relation to the proposed marriage, marriage, or former marriage of another person or other persons, and whether that counselling is provided to that person individually or as a member of a group of persons.

The operational definition of marriage counselling in use by the Attorney-General's Department as a guide for agencies states:

> Marriage counselling is operationally defined as a process where a neutral third party, focusing on the emotional dynamics of relationships and the stability of marriage within a family unit, assists parties to deal with the stresses they encounter as they move into, live within or move out of that family unit. (Fox 1988)

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Survey sample

All new clients presenting to the approved agencies for marriage counselling in Australia during a four-week period in October–November 1987 were approached by the counsellors to participate in the study prior to their first interview. Clients who agreed to participate in the study were followed-up eight months later.

The response rate to the pre-counselling survey was estimated to be around 40–45 per cent of all new clients (n=1302). The post-counselling response rate was 41 per cent (n=540). Sixty-eight per cent of the post-counselling respondents were female (365) and 32 per cent (169) were male.

Aims of the study

In order to determine effectiveness, the study concentrated on the following outcomes:

- change in relationship status;
- change in level of commitment to the relationship;
- satisfaction with counselling; and
- improvement in problem area, personal life and viability of relationship.

Key Findings

Who comes to counselling?

While there is an overall deficit in total agency clients of recent non-English-speaking migrants and a surplus of persons of upper socio-economic status (particularly women), marriage counselling clearly caters for substantial proportions of migrants and persons of lower socio-economic status. With a little more emphasis upon the deficit groups noted above, marriage counselling would be broadly representative of Australians in general.

Expectations of counselling

For 89 per cent of men and 77 per cent of women, the major goal of counselling was to remain in the relationship. Conversely 11 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women came to counselling with the intention to separate or to remain separated.

In addition to help in preserving or ending the relationship, respondents wanted assistance in acquiring skills to improve communication, handle conflicts and develop better personal relationships. They wanted to gain insight into their relationship and understanding of their own, and their partner's, contribution to the situation. They also hoped to gain emotional support.

Who initiated counselling?

In 46 per cent of cases women stated that they had initiated counselling compared to 28 per cent of men who claimed they had made the decision to come to counselling.

Counselling outcomes

Changes in the relationship

Before counselling:

- 70 per cent of men and 73 per cent of women were together in their relationship;
- 29 per cent of men and 27 per cent of women had already separated.

After counselling, of those who came together:

- 81 per cent of men and 78 per cent of women remained together;
- 19 per cent of men and 22 per cent of women had separated since counselling.

Amongst the initially separated:

- 11 per cent of men and 30 per cent of women had reconciled after counselling and were back living with their partner;
- 89 per cent of the separated men and 70 per cent of the women remained apart.

Counselling was significantly more successful in assisting women to get back together with their partner than it was with men. Overall, 60 per cent of men and 65 per cent of women were together; 35 per cent of women and 30 per cent of men were apart.

Commitment to the relationship

- 91 per cent of men and 79 per cent of women still in a relationship post-counselling were committed to their relationship. One-quarter of men and 30 per cent of women stated they were more optimistic about their relationship continuing after counselling than they had been when they started counselling.
- 34 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women had never considered divorce a possibility, but of those who had, 79 per cent of women and 91 per cent of men consider it less likely after counselling.

Amongst the men and women who remained together there were significant improvements in relationship satisfaction and relationship consensus. Their self-confidence and sense of wellbeing also improved.

Separated women significantly improved in self-esteem and wellbeing whereas separated men did not. The separated women were also more likely to report that life after separation was better, particularly in relation to their social life, parenting and career than separated males. The improvements post-counselling in these measures are all significantly related to counselling effectiveness.

Satisfaction with counselling

- 71 per cent of women and 62 per cent of men indicated they were satisfied with the marriage counselling they had received;

- 58 per cent of women and 54 per cent of men were satisfied with the results of counselling.

Satisfaction, however, was significantly related to the status of the relationship post-counselling particularly for men.

- 61 per cent of men and women who were in intact relationships were satisfied with the results of counselling;
- 57 per cent of separated women and 41 per cent of separated men were satisfied with the outcome;
- 70 per cent of women and men in intact relationships were satisfied with the counselling received;
- 68 per cent of separated women and 48 per cent of separated men were satisfied with the counselling received.

Another indication of satisfaction with counselling is whether people would return to counselling or recommend it to others.

- 63 per cent of men and women stated they would return to counselling if the need arose;
- over 80 per cent of men and women would recommend counselling to others.

Improvement in problem area, personal life and quality of relationship

In terms of improvement and change in the relationship the same pattern emerges:

- 78 per cent of women and 83 per cent of men in intact relationships thought the problems they came to counselling about had changed for the better;
- 49 per cent of women compared to 37 per cent of men who were separated thought the problems had changed for the better.

Overall, two-thirds of all men and women believed counselling had contributed to the resolution of problems. However 55 per cent of separated women and 61 per cent of separated men felt marriage counselling did not make any contribution to resolving their problems.

Counselling is predominantly about the couple or the relationship and so there is a need to examine joint levels of satisfaction and improvement. For example, in 47 per cent of cases both parties had changed for the better as a result of counselling. Individually, 69 per cent of clients had changed for the better, women significantly more so than men.

Satisfaction with and effectiveness of counselling were not related to individual characteristics such as education, income or availability of social support. Men with children gained more from counselling, but the presence of children did not influence counselling effectiveness for women. Younger women benefited more from counselling but age was not a factor for men. Relationship outcome is the main determinant of effectiveness for men — those who remain together said they benefited to a greater extent.

Counselling was also perceived as assisting clients individually as distinct from assisting the relationship, particularly for women. Men who separated subsequent to the start of counselling were the least satisfied with their lives as a whole, whereas women in the same situation gained in self-esteem and appeared more able to be assisted in coping with the process of separation. Nevertheless, almost half of separated men and two-thirds of separated women indicated they had changed personally for the better and 45 per cent of separated men had received some assistance with the separation process, compared to 59 per cent of women.

Cost Benefits

The government's contribution to marriage counselling services should be a reflection of the importance of helping couples to maintain their relationship or separate with a minimum amount of conflict.

In 1989–90 the Attorney-General's Department provided $7.695 million to subsidize the work of marriage counselling agencies throughout Australia. Department policy, approved in 1986, is to fund no more than 75 per cent of an approved organization's marriage counselling expenditure and to encourage agencies to raise at least 25 per cent of expenditure from fees.

Marriage counselling is thus a very inexpensive way of reducing later costs in litigation, social security benefits and personal and social consequences. If couples can be assisted in reconciliation or conciliation through counselling they will be less likely to have recourse to legal costs associated with the Family Court of Australia and Legal Aid. In addition, couples with children who are assisted to remain together rather than separate will reduce the number of parents requiring Supporting Parents Benefits. While there is no guarantee that marriages will continue to remain intact amongst the clients in this study, 91 per cent of men and 79 per cent of women who were in an intact relationship and had considered divorce, considered it less likely after counselling.

A cost-effectiveness argument developed in the report estimated an annual cost saving to government to be around 47.5 million in Family Law courts, Legal Aid and Supporting Parents Benefits. This estimation does not necessarily imply that a doubling of government expenditure on marrige counselling would lead to a doubling of these savings, because the population using the additional marriage counselling services may not behave in the same way as those currently using these services. In addition:

- almost half (29) of separated men and two-thirds of separated women (77) indicated they had changed personally for the better;
- 45 per cent of separated men had received some assistance with the separation process compared to 59 per cent of women;
- approximately one-third (23) of separated men and half (58) of separated women stated their problems were at least somewhat better since counselling;
- 30 per cent (33) of separated women and 25 per cent (15) of separated men said the relationship between them had changed for the better as a result of counselling.

For the separated men and women whom counselling did assist, there are clear cost-benefits. From the cost-benefit perspective, individuals who have

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been to counselling may, even if they do have recourse to legal and other services, use them more appropriately and effectively, with less litigation, and more sensitive handling of custody and access — thus saving court counselling costs. In this study very few who separated had used lawyers or entered the litigation process.

Conclusions

The majority of marriage counselling clients who participated in the study came to counselling with the expectation or hope that marriage counselling could improve the relationship and prevent its breakdown. These clients looked to counselling to understand what was happening in their relationship and to find a solution to their problems that would enable them to live together more harmoniously. A significant minority of clients, particularly women, approached counselling to make decisions about separation or for assistance in coping with the consequences of separation.

Counselling appears to be highly effective for the majority of clients who come to improve their relationship or manage to prevent breakdown. It is seen as less effective in dealing with situations where breakdown has occurred, particularly by men who do not want the separation.

Counselling appears to be less effective for many men, particularly in cases where their partner was not interested in continuing the relationship. Fewer of these men remained in counselling, so were unable to benefit from potential assistance in coping with the separation and its consequences for themselves as individuals, as fathers and as a future marital partner. Women tended to see more value in these personal aspects of counselling whatever the outcome of the relationship.

Implications

Clarification of aims

- It should be made clear to clients at the outset that marriage counselling is about not only 'mending' but 'ending' marriages. This may have implications for further training of counsellors in separation counselling and education may be required.
- The provision of clear explanations of the counselling process and what it can and can not do would be useful to ensure that clients do not retain unrealistic expectations of what counselling can achieve.
- The place of marriage counselling along the continuum of services to families needs to be addressed. This raises the question of where marriage counselling belongs along the continuum of preparation for marriage, marriage enhancement, adjusting to life cycle transitions such as parenthood and coping with the consequences of family breakdown.

Since the provision of marriage and family supports cross government departments of health, education, community services and the law, coordination across departments should be explored to avoid duplication of resources and services across all communities.

Accessibility

- More attention should be given to access in rural and outer metropolitan areas.
- There is a need for adequate provision of interpreters and outreach to ethnic communities to improve the accessibility of these populations.
- Weekend and evening times for counselling are necessary if working men and women are to be able to take advantage of the services.
- A better balance between male and female counsellors may increase access and usage by men.
- Some consideration should be given to linking marriage counselling services with other services such as parenting education, financial counselling, or even recreational programs. This may reduce the stigma that sometimes attaches to attending a marriage counselling service. Cost-savings on rental and ancillary administrative supports may be possible in a multi-service centre.

Outreach

Although studies have revealed that men who are separated could benefit from social services, men do not seek or receive help as often as women. Since men appear to be less comfortable or motivated to attend counselling, information about marriage counselling in a format appealing to men should be available where men tend to gather, at sporting clubs and work centres, even pubs. For both men and women marriage counselling information should be accessible at work locations and in community venues such as child care centres, neighbourhood houses, schools and community social centres.

Community forums and media programs on typical marital problems and strategies to resolve them should be considered. Community education is a priority. It is essential to get across the message that assistance with marital and family stress is not equated with failure or that only the disadvantaged and 'real' problem families go for assistance.

INTRODUCTION

High rates of divorce and the emotional and financial consequences that can follow family disruption for men, women and children have focused attention on the provision of services to assist people. Services may be directed toward preventing the breakdown of relationships or coping with the effects of separation and dissolution of relationships. Marriage counselling is one such service. Although marriage and family counselling services are available through a variety of sources (for example, private psychiatrists and psychologists, social workers in community centres, the clergy, the Family Court and mediation centres), marriage counselling agencies approved by the Attorney-General's Department are approached by a large number of people who seek help with their relationships.

During 1987–88 approved marriage counselling agencies handled 43 857 cases involving 156 502 interviews. Concerns about accountability and the cost-effectiveness of social services provided by the government have led to increased interest in the evaluation of these services.

Rationale for the Study

This study was undertaken by the Institute in response to a request from the Commonwealth Attorney-General to develop a project 'to measure the effectiveness of marriage counselling' and to provide 'evidence on the effect of marriage counselling on marital status and the long-term stability of relationships'. Such a study was to provide the Attorney-General with information on which to base future government decisions regarding financial support for marriage counselling activities.

Information collected annually by the Psychology and Counselling Section of the Attorney-General's Department indicated that in 1987–88 83 per cent of male and 88 per cent of female clients who completed an outcome form reported a positive outcome at the end of the counselling sessions. However in approximately 30 per cent of cases, the client's perception of outcome was unknown. Except for several small studies conducted by individual agencies, the long-lasting effects of counselling have not been examined. In addition, until 1987 when a revised Face Sheet was developed, the Attorney-General's Department did not collect any demographic or socio-economic information about clients. This limited the ability to analyse the conditions under which marriage counselling is more or less effective.

With the approval of the Institute's Board of Management, the Institute agreed to set up a Steering Committee to define the nature and scope of the study. In addition to the Director, Deputy Director and research staff of the Institute, members of the Steering Committee included representatives from the National Marriage Guidance Council, the Australian Council of Marriage Counselling Organizations, the National Catholic Association of Family Agencies, the Attorney-General's Department, the Family Law Council, the Department of Social Security and the Australian Council for Educational Research.

Aims of the Study

The study aimed to assess the efficacy of counselling services offered by the approved marriage counselling agencies by examining to what extent marriage counselling enabled clients to resolve the problems and concerns that brought them to counselling, to determine what aspects of the counselling process were considered most or least helpful, and to ascertain whether the benefits gained from the counselling experience were maintained over a period of time. More specifically, the study aimed:

- to investigate the characteristics of those who make use of marriage counselling services;
- to determine what impact counselling has on resolving marital and relationship problems of couples and/or individuals who present as clients to approved marriage counselling agencies, and to examine what changes, if any, have occurred;
- to examine what client characteristics (for example, relationship status, demographic factors) are related to counselling outcomes;
- to determine how counselling assisted individuals and the relationship;
- to examine how selected aspects of the counselling process (for example, number of sessions, joint or individual interviews) are related to counselling outcomes;
- to determine what aspects of the counselling process clients found most and least helpful, and what would have been more helpful;
- to determine what aspects of service delivery clients found satisfactory or unsatisfactory;
- to determine what other factors in the client's life situation (for example, new baby, new job, other forms of help) might have contributed to the resolution of marital problems.

Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. It does not compare marriage counselling as provided by approved agencies with other forms of marriage and family support services (for example, the Family Court, family conciliation and mediation centres, community health centres). It does not compare the effectiveness of one specific counselling approach or intervention with another (for example, behavioural therapy with psychoanalytic therapy). Finally, the study does not examine the questions of how couples with marital problems cope if they do not attend marriage counselling, and whether or not they seek and find appropriate help elsewhere.

Initially it was hoped the study could explore marriage counselling services within the wider network of family support services available in the community in order to better understand the place of marriage counselling in a range of formal and informal services used by people to help them cope with family and personal crises. It was also hoped that the study would include components to measure the cost effectiveness of marriage counselling services provided by the approved agencies in comparison with other counselling and family support services in the community.

The complexity and cost of this broader approach was considered beyond the Institute's financial and staff resources at this time and also went beyond the requested brief; however, the study design incorporates components that will enable some assessment of direct and indirect cost savings to the community to be made.

PART ONE

MARRIAGE COUNSELLING IN AUSTRALIA

1

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN THE PROVISION OF COUNSELLING SERVICES

Since 1960, the Australian Government has provided subsidies to both church and secular marriage counselling organizations. Government provisions for marriage counselling initially vested in the *Matrimonial Causes Act, 1959* are now contained in the *Family Law Act, 1975*. Marriage counselling services funded under the *Family Law Act* are administered and monitored by the Family Services Section of the Attorney-General's Department.

Administration of the marriage counselling services involves pre-approval evaluation of organizations requesting approval and subsidy and post-approval monitoring of agencies to ensure they continue to meet the requirements of the *Family Law Act* and policy guidelines issued by the Attorney-General. Statistics on counselling activities and outcomes are collected annually. The *Family Law Act* sets out some guidelines regarding how funding for agencies is to be monitored, but does not clearly establish procedures for monitoring the actual counselling provided.

The Counselling and Psychology Section of the Attorney-General's Department has developed standards by which agencies are approved and continue to receive funds. These conditions include guidelines for the selection, training, supervision and continuing education of counsellors (Harvey 1983a; Fox 1988). (For a summary of the history of marriage counselling policy in Australia see Wolcott 1984.)

Currently, 25 agencies are approved by the Attorney-General's Department to provide marriage counselling services. These agencies operate approximately 190 branch offices and venues in all the States and Territories.

The Attorney-General's Department encourages established organizations to extend their services in the community, if a need for additional services is determined, rather than approving new organizations. The reasoning behind this policy is to enable greater efficiency both in the provision of services and in monitoring agency standards (Harvey 1983a; Fox 1988).

Funding

In 1989–90 the Attorney-General's Department provided $7.69 million to subsidize the work of marriage counselling agencies throughout Australia (Table 1).

Table 1 sets out the total departmental subsidy of marriage counselling agencies and indicates the percentage of increase over the years 1976–1989. Department policy, approved in 1986, is to fund no more than 75 per cent of an approved organization's marriage counselling expenditure and to encourage agencies to raise at least 25 per cent of expenditures from fees. However, no client is to be denied services because of an inability to pay a fee. A memo to all directors of marriage counselling agencies reinforces this intention:

> It should be emphasized that the Government's purpose in providing financial assistance for marriage counselling is not to undertake total financial responsibility for the provision of counselling services. The scheme is designed to provide financial encouragement to voluntary organizations to develop, maintain and extend marriage counselling services. Each organization is expected to raise a proportion of its income from other sources, which will include client fees or donations and financial support by a sponsoring body, such as a church. (Attorney-General's Department 1985)

This funding policy was confirmed in a memo to the directors of all approved agencies in December 1988 (Fox 1988).

Table 1: Attorney-General's Department subsidy of marriage counselling agencies, 1976–77 to 1989–90

Year	Total subsidy $	% increase over previous year
1976–77	1 927 000	20.2
1977–78	2 100 000	9.0
1978–79	2 281 000	8.6
1979–80	2 450 000	7.4
1980–81	2 750 000	12.2
1981–82	2 950 000	7.3
1982–83	3 320 000	12.5
1983–84	3 685 000	11.0
1984–85	4 100 000	11.3
1985–86	4 700 000	14.6
1986–87	4 745 000	1.0
1987–88	6 275 000	32.2
1988–89	6 969 000	11.1
1989–90	7 695 000	10.4

Source: Attorney-General's Department, Canberra 1989

According to the Department, the assessment of grants to approved agencies is based on meeting the 'reasonable needs' of organizations. The assessment follows a uniform pattern for all agencies. The principle of deficit funding is applied. Each agency submits its proposed budget which is then examined against the audited account of the previous year's expenditures to ensure expenditure is made in accordance with the approval of the agency and compliance with the agency's level of activity. Items of proposed expenditure not within the terms of the agency's approval are deducted while special requests such as extra funds for remote services may be considered within funds available. Other available income sources are taken into account, and an allocation is then made to each agency. Grants to agencies may be distributed on a pro-rata basis, depending on the overall Attorney-General's Department budget appropriation for that year (Personal communication, Attorney-General's Department, March 1988).

Grant allocations to individual agencies also take into consideration judgements about individual agency efficiency. Reports from on-site visits made to agencies by Department officers can be a component of these evaluations.

In 1988–89 government subsidies to individual agencies ranged from $30 000 to $1.158 million. Agencies were subsidized on average for 63 per cent of their expenditures, the highest 90 per cent, the lowest 25 per cent. Over the last 12 years, the overall proportion of total government subsidy to total agency expenditures has declined from a high of 78 per cent in 1976–77 to a low of 59 per cent in 1988–89. A factor in this decline is the implementation of a fee-for-service model in organisations and the avail-

Table 2: Average per cent Government subsidy of total agency expenditure, 1976–89

Year	Total agency expenditure $	Total Government subsidy $	Average Govt subsidy of total agency expenditure %
1976–77	2 455 440	1 927 000	78.5
1977–78	2 930 293	2 100 000	71.6
1978–79	3 144 802	2 281 000	72.5
1979–80	3 408 625	2 450 000	71.8
1980–81	3 894 156	2 750 000	70.6
1981–82	4 518 714	2 950 000	65.2
1982–83	5 807 211	3 320 000	62.3
1983–84	5 549 544	3 685 000	66.4
1984–85	6 357 823	4 100 000	64.4
1985–86	7 609 585	4 700 000	61.7
1986–87	8 027 421	4 745 000	59.1
1987–88	9 935 818	6 275 000	63.1
1988–89	not available	6 969 000	—
1989–90	not available	7 695 000	—

Source: Attorney-General's Department, Canberra 1989 ability of funds from a sponsoring organisation.

Table 2 shows the proportion of government subsidy of total agency expenditures for 1976–89. Figures in both Tables 1 and 2 reflect the latest information available to the Institute.

The average agency cost per interview in 1986–87 (calculated by dividing the total agency expenditure for marriage counselling services by total number of agency interviews) was $55, ranging from a high of $122 to a low of $40 for individual agencies. A high proportion of agency expenditures is associated with staff salaries, approximately 78 per cent of total expenditure in 1986–87 (Personal correspondence, Attorney-General's Department, March 1988). Table 3 sets out the number of interviews and average agency cost for interviews between 1976 and 1987.

Table 3: Number of interviews and average agency cost per interview, 1976–77 to 1987

Year	Total number of interviews	Average agency cost per interview $	Average Govt subsidy per interview $
1976–77	101 469	24.19	18.99
1977–78	112 030	26.16	18.74
1978–79	110 478	28.47	20.65
1979–80	114 063	29.88	21.48
1980–81	119 989	32.45	22.92
1981–82	128 041	36.29	23.04
1982–83	133 194	38.21	24.93
1983–84	136 480	40.66	27.00
1984–85	138 722	45.83	29.56
1985–86	146 180	52.06	32.15
1986–87	144 459	55.53	32.83

Source: Attorney-General's Department, Canberra 1988

Differences between agency grants and costs are related to a number of factors. Centres in remote areas incur additional costs, rental costs vary with location, some agencies may have low-cost accommodation and operating expenses if they are a service within a multipurpose organization. Salaries vary according to the professional qualifications of staff and the number of sessional or staff counsellors or volunteers who may carry out some of the counselling in some agencies. Some agencies may have more efficient management procedures than others. It is the role of the Attorney-General's Department to monitor all these factors and ensure that organizations operate cost-effectively.

In recent years, however, some of the approved agencies have reported increasing deficits, rising fees, inadequate staffing levels and increased waiting lists attributed to the level of funding received from the Attorney-General's Department. During 1986, several branch offices were closed down and staff retrenched in response, according to the organizations, to the inadequate increase in subsidies of only a little under one per cent over the previous year's grant (Hartin 1986). An additional allocation of $670 000 was made to agencies for 1987–1988 above the original grant of $5 605 000, an increase of 32 per cent over the previous year (see Table 1).

Marriage counselling agencies have expressed their sense of frustration and unfairness in their having to charge clients trying to *prevent* marriage breakdown or enhance marriages while Family Court counselling services are free for those who are divorcing.

During 1987, counselling was provided free in the Family Court of Australia to 53 503 individuals which included parties to a marriage and/or their family. An additional 2794 counselling cases were reported by the Family Court of Western Australia (Family Law Council Annual Report 1987–88).

Marriage counselling organisations and officers of the Attorney-General's Department have attempted to point out the cost savings to government were marriage counselling services to be made available to the community. References have been made to savings in Supporting Parents Benefits payments, legal aid and Family Court costs if even a small proportion of clients attending counselling are enabled to improve their relationship enough to remain together. Additional indirect cost benefits derived from successful marriage counselling include reductions in employee absenteeism, rates of alcoholism or drug consumption, child abuse, and mental or physical illness that could result from a decrease in tensions in the marriage (Harvey 1979; Hartin 1986; Eastman 1989).

The question of duplication and overlap with other services, specifically the Family Court Counselling Service and the pilot Family Conciliation Centres, has been raised by the marriage counselling agencies and the Family Law Council (1985). The Attorney-General's Department has been concerned that marriage counselling be distinguished from health and welfare or individual psychotherapy counselling, which is funded by other state or federal health and welfare departments. Guidelines approved by the Attorney-General in 1988 (Fox 1988) attempt to further clarify the distinctions between marriage counselling, marriage education and family mediation.

The philosophy and policy underlying the role and function of the government in the provision of marriage counselling and related family support services for individuals, couples and families experiencing stress in the maintenance or dissolution of their relationships has become a matter for considerable debate.

2

ROLE OF MARRIAGE COUNSELLING AGENCIES

Organisations currently approved and funded by the Attorney-General made application for approval under Section 12 (2) of the *Family Law Act, 1975* which provides for:

> 12 (2) The Attorney-General may approve any such organisation (voluntary) as a marriage counselling organisation where he is satisfied that:
> (a) the organisation is willing and able to engage in marriage counselling; and
> (b) marriage counselling constitutes or will constitute the whole or the major part of its activities.

The 25 approved marriage counselling agencies include the National Marriage Guidance Councils which operate in each State and Territory, the Catholic Family Welfare Agencies which are located in each State and the ACT, the Anglican Marriage Guidance in Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland, UNIFAM (Uniting Church), The Family Life Movement, the Baptist Counselling Service, New South Wales; Cairnmillar Institute, Citizen's Welfare Bureau, Victoria, and Adelaide Central Mission.

Agencies provide an annual statistical report to the Attorney-General's Department recording the numbers of clients, interviews and outcomes as required. Where time and finances permit, departmental staff visit agencies and consult with them on issues of selection, training and supervision of counsellors to monitor how well agencies are meeting established departmental standards.

Over the years, organisations have questioned some of the Department's definitions and boundaries of allowable funded activities. Specifically, educational activities about marriage, divorce and remarriage are not separately funded since they do not necessarily meet the definition of marriage counselling as interpreted by the Department. The emphasis on conjoint interviews as an indicator that marriage counselling, rather than individual psychotherapy or other forms of counselling, is taking place has also been queried.

The Department itself has raised the issue of whether marriage counselling activities, as they have broadened in definition and scope, should be funded entirely under the *Family Law Act* and the Attorney-General's Department (Harvey 1983b).

Although the 25 agencies are not uniform in their structure or administration of services, over the years many have reported similar concerns in relation to funding of services — deficits, fee increases, reduction of staff, limits on training, and increased waiting lists.

Counsellors

Until recently, many agencies relied primarily on volunteer counsellors to provide counselling, with some entirely staffed by volunteer counsellors. This practice enabled counselling to be provided at a very low cost to the government since counsellor salaries, which account for a substantial percentage of operating costs, were kept to a minimum. Changes in the way the community views volunteer work, along with professional advances in the theory and technique of counselling, have moved marriage counselling away from Sir Garfield Barwick's original concept for the establishment of marriage counselling agencies in which counsellors 'volunteer their good offices in this very skilful and sympathetic task' (quoted in Harvey 1983b). The decision to move from a free counselling service towards the charging of fees was in line with a growing practice in service organisations, reflecting the user pays policy of government.

According to their annual reports, there has been a gradual introduction of payment at Social Worker and Psychologist award rates to accredited counsellors. Marriage Guidance Council affiliates have all introduced fees based on a sliding scale according to client income. Fees range from $55 to $5 per interview (Hartin 1986). Unifam raised its recommended client 'contribution' from $30 in 1986 to $50 in 1987. Although most Catholic affiliated agencies do not charge fees, several of the Catholic agencies raised the issue of charging client fees in their most recent Annual Reports. A number of church affiliated agencies seek donations which are tax deductible.

As the director of one agency recently remarked, it is the 'beginning of a new era in which counsellors, trainers and supervisors receive a reasonable sessional fee . . . clients will be expected to make a realistic payment for the valuable service they receive' (UNIFAM Annual Report 1986–1987).

Reports to the Attorney-General's Department in 1987–88 indicated a staff complement of 275 agency staff counsellors, of whom approximately two-thirds are part-time, and 239 part-time sessional counsellors. This may be an under-estimate of counselling staff since not all agencies reported the number of sessional counsellors. (Personal communication, Attorney-General's Department, April, 1988).

According to a survey of counsellor characteristics conducted by the Attorney-General's Department in 1988 (Fox 1989), there are proportionally more female (77 per cent) than male (22 per cent) counsellors. The majority of counsellors have tertiary/professional qualifications and specialist training in marriage counselling.

Counsellors reported using a variety of counselling approaches with 'Client-Centred' and 'Systems Theory' most common. The increased emphasis on expertise is confirmed in a statement on minimum standards issued by the Department (Fox 1988): 'Marriage counsellors . . . should develop and maintain the highest level of expertise possible to ensure the public receives the best possible service'. A minimum of fortnightly supervision is required for all counsellors.

Related Agency Activities

In addition to the activity defined and subsidized as marriage counselling, most marriage counselling agencies conduct other relationship-related programs, with several offering programs for separated people and for those in remarried families, and some offering workshops on enhancing relationships in general. A number of the larger agencies offer training programs in marriage counselling and family therapy skills for other professionals in the community such as social workers in community service agencies or the police. These activities are not subsidized under the Act as they are generally a source of income for the agency.

Since this study was undertaken, interest has increased in the use of mediation as a technique to resolve marital and family disputes including those between parents and adolescents. In 1989–90, the Attorney-General appropriated $530 000 to organisations to conduct family mediation sessions and $900 000 for mediation and family therapy initatives targeted at homeless youth.

3

DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

Marriage counselling is defined in the *Family Law Act, 1975*, Section 4 (1):

> 'marriage counselling' includes the counselling of a person in relation to:
>
> (a) entering into marriage;
> (b) reconciliation of the parties to a marriage;
> (c) separation of the parties to a marriage;
> (d) the dissolution or annulment of a marriage; or
> (e) adjusting to the dissolution or annulment of a marriage, whether that counselling is provided in relation to the proposed marriage, marriage, or former marriage of that person or in relation to the proposed marriage, marriage, or former marriage of another person or other persons, and whether that counselling is provided to that person individually or as a member of a group of persons.

The operational definition of marriage counselling in use by the Attorney-General's Department as a guide for agencies states:

> Marriage counselling is operationally defined as a process where a neutral third party, focusing on the emotional dynamics of relationships and the stability of marriage within a family unit, assists parties to deal with the stresses they encounter as they move into, live within or move out of that family unit (Fox 1988).

For the purposes of the Attorney-General's Department in terms of providing funding to agencies, a marriage relationship includes both legal marriages and de facto relationships. Marriage counselling may include interviews with individuals, couples, families or groups where the primary focus of counselling is the relationship. The definition of marriage counselling is now interpreted broadly enough to include family mediation and family therapy sessions with the couple and children under the age of 18 years where the difficulties are 'directly related to the stability of the marriage within the context of the family unit' (Attorney-Generl's Department 1988; Fox 1989). However, the proportion of sessions in which a couple is seen together is expected to exceed one-third of all interviews conducted because it encourages participation by men in marriage counselling. This supports the 'focus on the stability of the marriage within the family unit' (Fox 1988).

Specialist marriage counselling is thus distinguished from other personal, practical, or health and welfare counselling services, particularly individual psychotherapy. Marriage education activities, as distinct from pre-marital counselling, have been considered a separate function and are funded under the *Marriage Act, 1961* provisions, although these activities are often carried out by the same approved agencies.

The distinctions made between marriage counselling, family counselling, family therapy, psychotherapy and health and welfare counselling are not always clear and well defined. Mediation and conciliation interventions have now been added to these categories. Distinctions made between marriage counselling and marriage education appear even more artificial. The Attorney-General's Department claims distinctions are imposed in accordance with the requirement of accountability for funds expended by government. Counsellors, particularly in multi-service agencies, report difficulties in isolating specific marriage counselling interventions from other counselling and advice offered to clients who present with problems identified as something else (for example, children's misbehaviour, depression, unemployment) (Brannen and Collard 1982; Mattinson and Sinclair 1979).

Aims of Marriage Counselling

Silverman (1972) states: 'The practice of marriage counselling consists of the application of principles, methods, and techniques of counselling and psychotherapy for the purpose of resolving psychological conflict, modifying perception and behaviour, altering old attitudes and establishing new ones in the area of marriage and family life' (p.14). He notes that marriage counselling can include the processes of therapy, counselling and education and that it is difficult to draw a dividing line between them. Olson, Russell and Sprenkle (1980) point out that while the practice of marital therapy has broadened from a focus on married couples to include all types of relationships ranging from same sex relationships, cohabiting couples, single-parent and remarried families, the unifying concept underlying the field of marital therapy is the 'emphasis on treating problems within a relationship context'.

According to Harvey (1979), who was the Principal Psychologist with the Psychology and Counselling Section of the Attorney-General's Department from the time marriage counselling was first funded in 1960 until 1984, the object of all therapeutic and educational counselling is to assist partners to communicate more effectively, to help people change attitudes and behaviours, to help them become more competent in living their own lives, and to help them develop their sense of self-esteem, but not to achieve a particular outcome. However, in summarizing the debates in Parliament and relevant sections of the *Family Law Act, 1975*, pertaining to the role of government in the provision of marriage counselling services, Harvey (1983a) states the government's objectives were 'to encourage the development of marriage counselling organizations so that people with marital difficulties might have an alternative to divorce.'

At their Annual Meeting in 1987, the National Marriage Guidance Council of Australia, representing constituent counselling organizations in each State and Territory comprising 55 branches, endorsed the following mission statement: 'Enhancing marriage and family relationships in their various forms through counselling, education, and social policy formation.'

The majority of approved marriage counselling agencies have defined statements of aims, purposes and objectives. 'The aim of the Council is to provide specialist professional services to assist people at any stage in their relationships' (Annual Report 1986–1987, Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria).

These same objectives are found in marriage counselling organisations in other countries. For example, the National Marriage Guidance Council in the United Kingdom (now called Relate), which trains marriage counsellors and provides volunteer counselling services throughout the United Kingdom, recently adopted the following Statement of Common Purpose:

> The National Marriage Guidance Council believes that its services must be devoted primarily to helping couples and individuals in the context of their marriages, thus also helping the surrounding family. MG accepts that in our diverse society its concept of marriage must encompass differing cultural understandings of marriage and other committed adult relationships. M.G's focus on marriage understood in this way is its distinctive contributions to strengthening families, and thus the concerns of children are significant to the council's work, as are the relationships between adult partners and their own parents (*Marriage Lines*, 1987).

The National Marriage Guidance Council of New Zealand which provides a network of 'trained helpers' in personal, couple, family and Family Court counselling in 60 locations, describes its aim as 'to enhance people's ability to make close personal relationships particularly in the field of marriage and family life' (*Annual Report*, 1987, the National Marriage Guidance Council of New Zealand).

Marriage counselling as defined in the *Family Law Act*, by marriage theorists and in descriptions of agency aims and objectives, encompasses not just the common connotation of helping to prevent divorce through the enhancement of the marital relationship, but also the role of assisting couples to mitigate the consequences of divorce where divorce has been considered a necessary or inevitable decision.

Counselling Theory and Forms of Intervention

Counselling interventions will be influenced by the ideas and values held about marriage and family life by both counsellors and clients. How problems are defined, their assumed etiology and the means chosen to achieve a resolution will be shaped by these beliefs.

Counsellors in marriage counselling agencies subscribe to various intervention techniques based on a variety of theoretical approaches. The three most common theoretical approaches are psychoanalytic, social learning — cognitive or behavioural, and structural-strategic or systems theory (Gurman 1978; Jacobson and Gurman 1986).

- Psychoanalytic marital therapy is embedded in concepts which focus on the processes governing intimate relationships, their psychological, affective, interpersonal determinants and the meeting of unconscious needs. Emphasis is placed on past family history and unconscious factors, particularly those associated with dimensions of attachment, separation and loss, in contributing to present symptoms and behaviour (Nadelson 1978).
- The social-learning cognitive perspective or behavioural marital therapy model emphasizes the identification of positive and negative behaviour exchanges between partners which increase or detract from satisfaction in the relationship. It provides the therapeutic environment for enhancing satisfying behaviours. Communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills are emphasized (Jacobson and Holtzworth-Munroe 1986).
- Structural-strategic or systems theory marital therapy focuses on the current developmental stage and transitions within the family life cycle. The impact of family of origin, children, friends and the work environment are considered. Therapeutic change emphasizes renegotiation of power dynamics, alliances and intergenerational boundaries. Family rules, myths and coping patterns are considered. Techniques may also include training in communication and problem-solving techniques (Todd 1986).

Other therapeutic techniques have evolved from these basic theoretical approaches, with common derivations including transactional analysis, client-centered therapy, gestalt and existential therapy. Counsellors trained as social workers or psychologists use elements of all these approaches, often called an eclectic perspective. Similar interventions may result from different theoretical explanations (James and Wilson 1986).

Despite different nomenclature, all the schools of therapy share similar goals for the outcome of the therapeutic intervention. Kaslow (1987) has described these common denominators as: modification of dysfunctional communication patterns, development of role flexibility and adaptability, a balancing of power, a move away from blame and coercion to give-and-take responsibility, and the establishment of individuality within the marital and family collective. Clearly, an underlying 'model' of satisfactory marriage is implicit here, a value position that may not match that of every group or presenting couple.

Counselling theories and interventions mainly focus on the internal dynamics and processes of relationships rather than on the impact of external social structures such as the state of the economy, the availability of community resources and extended support networks on personal and family wellbeing (Edgar 1987). Counselling as an ameliorative intervention has been criticized for not really providing solutions to the more essential needs of individuals and families for adequate income, employment, health care and housing that may underlie or aggravate the stress and tension in many relationships (Mattinson and Sinclair 1979; Garbarino 1987; Edgar 1987).

Social Context of Marriage Counselling

Any evaluation of the effectiveness of marriage counselling cannot be examined in isolation from the social environment in which it takes place. Marriage counselling as an intervention exists in a social context which reflects a diversity of opinions, attitudes and values about the institutions of marriage and family, the legitimacy of other kinds of intimate relationships, and the roles of men and women in society. There is both personal and community ambivalence about the meaning of marriage and family. Marriage counselling as an entity reflects these conceptual shifts (Reiger 1987; Chester 1985).

Forms of legal regulation and provision of social supports change the nature and meaning of marriage as an institution and, concomitantly, also that of divorce. Laws removing the social stigma of illegitimacy, the availability of no-fault divorce, the legitimation of a variety of sexual behaviours, equal access to education and occupations for women and the enactment of other sex discrimination legislation, the provision of Supporting Parents Benefits and child care facilities, the availability of maternity and parental leave all alter the traditional meaning of marriage (Sussman 1987).

When a family wage was paid only to married men, when women were required to leave their jobs upon marriage, when access to education, employment, and housing was restricted, when women were denied custody or access to children after divorce, and when sexual activity outside marriage bowed to a rigid 'double standard', the institution of marriage was a powerful form of social control. Thornton and Freedman (1982) have declared that 'single persons now have access to many of the benefits traditionally reserved for married couples', while Weyrauch (1983) observes that 'formal or ceremonial marriage is no longer absolutely necessary, it becomes one of several legally recognized lifestyles'.

Recent developments in family law appear to be reclaiming some jurisdiction over how people organize their family lives. The *Family Law (Amendment) Act (1987)* and the *Child Support Act* state clearly that parents have legal rights and responsibilities toward their children that take precedence over other commitments.

Today, marriage is seen more as a relationship that satisfies emotional and companionship needs rather than as a vehicle to provide sanction for sexual activity or social status. Marriages in recent decades have been characterized as being caught between the conflicting messages of, on the one hand, the ethos of self-sacrifice, commitment and responsibility to others prevalent in earlier eras and, on the other hand, the ideology of personal growth and self-fulfilment that emerged in the 1970s (McDonald 1988).

In the more traditional marriages there were more modest expectations than today about feelings of mutuality and intimacy, and there was more emphasis on the less ambiguous demands of being a 'housewife' or 'provider'. Roles were more clearly defined. When there are greater options and choices, more emphasis on equality in relationships and less rigid definitions of what it means to be a wife or husband, mother or father, there are more opportunities for disagreement and need for compromise and negotiation. Even the decision of when to have a child can become problematic with the advent of effective contraception. High expectations, whether realistic or idealistic, combined with the very real pressures of children, work and, for increasing numbers, financial strain, can contribute to potential stress and tension in marriages.

The evaluation of marriage counselling must, therefore, take into consideration the social, cultural, and psychological perspective of the individuals who seek counselling, their attitudes and values about marriage and family, their life experiences and opportunities and the external constraints that limit or expand their options — their 'constructions of reality' (Berger and Kellner 1964).

Levels of toleration for conflict, tension, unhappiness or dissatisfaction in any relationship will be different for each person. Couples who characterize their relationships as satisfactory have been observed to have many of the same problems and stresses as couples who complain of highly distressed relationships (Hay and Blampied 1981; Cuber and Harroff 1965). Personal perceptions about the meaning of marriage and evaluations of the benefits or costs to remaining in or leaving a relationship, particularly men's and women's versions of 'his and her' marriages (Bernard 1972) will affect people's decisions to maintain or dissolve a relationship (Spanier and Lewis 1980; Udry 1981).

4

ISSUES IN PREVIOUS RESEARCH — REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The questions most frequently asked in the evaluation of marriage counselling programs have been cogently stated by Beck (1976): 'Is marital counselling effective? With whom, with what problems, with what approaches, by what methods of assessment, compared with what types of control group, within what time frame, with what level of investment?.'

Research on Effectiveness of Counselling

Since 1970 there has been an increase in the number of studies evaluating the effectiveness of marriage counselling (Kaslow 1987; Hahlweg and Markman 1988, Olsen, Russell and Sprenkle 1980; Lebow 1981; Gurman and Kniskern 1981; Brannen and Collard 1982; Jacobson, Follette, Revenstorf, Halweg, Baucom and Margolin 1984; Johnson and Greenberg 1985; Hooper 1985).

Outcome criteria commonly used to assess the effectiveness of marriage counselling include the improvement in the quality of, or satisfaction with, the relationship between partners, individual improvement, and change in the status of the relationship (for example, reconciled or separated). In addition, studies have frequently included measures of client satisfaction with the counselling process, the counsellor and counselling outcome.

Researchers overseas and in Australia have consistently reported a positive outcome for marital counselling in approximately two-thirds of all cases studied (Huppert 1975; Beck 1975; Eckersley and Garrow 1976; Olson, Russell and Sprenkle 1980; Gurman and Kniskern 1981, 1986; Brown and Manela 1977; Hunt 1985; Burnett 1985; National Marriage Guidance Council of Australia 1978; Wiederkehr, Pittman and Villaroman 1981).

In a review of over 200 controlled and uncontrolled studies of marital and family therapy that ranged across a variety of treatment approaches, Gurman (1978) reported overall improvement rates of approximately 66 per cent. Beck's (1975) findings on the outcomes of marital counselling also showed positive improvements in all but one of 32 controlled studies reviewed. More recently, after reviewing over three dozen 'well designed, controlled studies' of the outcomes of various conjoint couples therapy, Gurman and Kniskern (1986) concluded that 'at least three-quarters have found clearly positive therapeutic effects that surpass those resulting from no-treatment or wait-list control couples'.

Annual statistics submitted to the Attorney-General's Department from all approved marriage counselling agencies in Australia indicate that two-thirds to three-quarters of clients whose views are known report a positive counselling outcome.

Methodological Questions

Despite positive reports of the global outcome of marital therapy as quoted above, questions have been raised about the long-term effectiveness of marriage counselling. Major methodological problems in evaluating the effectiveness of marriage counselling have been reported in the literature (Beck 1975; Jacobson 1978; Williams and Miller 1981; Gurman and Kniskern 1981; Gurman, Kniskern and Pinsof 1986; Hartin 1983; L'Abate and McHenry 1983; Lebow 1981; Campbell and Carteret 1984; Wells and Giannetti 1986). Generally, concerns focus on the criteria for assessing the effectiveness of counselling. The same issues have been expressed in relation to the outcomes of family therapy, and it is not uncommon for evaluation studies to refer to either marriage counselling, marital or family therapy (Olson, Russell and Sprenkle 1980; Gurman and Kniskern 1981; Lebow 1981; Hooper 1985; Crane, Griffin and Hill 1986).

A brief summary of methodological issues in the evaluation of the effectiveness of marriage counselling follows.

Samples

Small samples consisting of 5–20 couples are common. Volunteers used often to come from middle class and college educated populations. Client characteristics such as socio-economic status, family structure and motivation are not reported. Frequently couples are in minimally distressed relationships. Johnson and Greenberg (1985), for example, excluded couples who were separated or living apart, had a primarily sexual dysfunction or where symptoms of alcoholism or depression were evident. Snyder and Wills (1989) included only married couples who were willing to commit themselves to working on the marriage in conjoint therapy.

The argument has been raised that evidence of the impact of counselling cannot be accurately measured unless couples who do not seek counselling but who may be in equally distressed or conflictual marriages are included in studies. The absence of such couples precludes discovery of whether client problems would have diminished over time without treatment, that is, 'spontaneous remission' (Jacobson 1981). On the other hand, Gurman and Kniskern (1981) point out that there is no such thing as a true control group, only comparative studies of different treatment situations. According to the authors, 'untreated couples' frequently receive treatment of one kind or another from either informal or formal sources (for example, a doctor or a friend), while outside of the treatment dimension. The value of using each client as as its own control by measuring change pre- and post-treatment has been advocated (Hooper 1985).

Treatment and technique variables

Most research on the effectiveness of marital counselling has concentrated on comparisons between various theoretical approaches (for example, behavioural, existential, analytic) or treatment modes (for example, group, individual or joint sessions) (L'Abate and McHenry 1983; Jacobson, Follette, Revenstorf, Baucom, Hahlweg and Margolin 1984; Johnson and Greenberg 1985; Greenberg, James and Conry 1988; Wells and Giannetti 1986; Wills, Faitler and Snyder 1987).

L'Abate and McHenry (1983) concluded from their survey of the literature that Behavioural Marital Therapy was no more effective than non-behavioural approaches: 'comparative studies indicate contradictory results for preferred mode of treatment although there is some evidence to indicate the validity of including communication-skills training for couples in the treatment program.' Crowe (1978), cited in Hooper (1985), found behavioural approaches to have positive results in some areas while other dimensions responded better to more general marital therapy. A similar conclusion was reached by Baucom and Hoffman (1986) who found no significant differences in improved marital adjustment among couples who received Communication Training or other behavioural Marital Therapy approaches, although skills in communication improved. A recent study by Snyder and Wills (1989) comparing the effects of behavioural and insight-oriented marital therapy confirmed the general 'equivalence of behavioural and insight-oriented therapies in producing positive changes in individual and relationship functioning'.

Other treatment outcome studies indicate that the success rate for a variety of treatment interventions rarely exceeds 65 per cent and results are often contradictory. Gurman and Kniskern (1981) state that 'largely positive results emerge on the basis of a wide variety of criteria, on change measures from a number of evaluative perspectives, for many types of marital and family problems, from therapy conducted by clinicians of all the major therapeutic disciplines, and in therapy carried out in a number of treatment settings' (p.752). Lambert, Shapiro and Bergin (1986) declare that 'psychological treatments are, overall and in general, beneficial, although it remains equally true that not everyone benefits to a satisfactory degree' (p.158).

Commenting on the use of individual versus joint marital therapy approaches, Wells and Giannetti (1986) argue that 'there is highly inadequate evidence available to reach any conclusions concerning either the absolute or relative effectiveness of individual marital therapy'. In partial rebuttal, Gurman and Kniskern (1986) state that 'there is a large body of acceptable evidence of the *efficacy* of conjoint marital therapy'. Bennun (1984) raises the issue that poor results from one-partner treatment may be associated with a lack of focus on the marital relationship in comparison to personal problems within the individual treatment setting. In 1986–87, approximately 42 per cent of all interviews conducted by the approved agencies were joint interviews.

The length of treatment is another concern. Gurman and Kniskern (1981) conclude that 'brief time-limited treatments and other brief treatments (arbitrarily defined as up to 20 sessions) are, in general, probably equal in effectiveness to lengthier family therapies'. Huppert (1975) felt that single interviews were often of considerable help to clients and were, 'not necessarily counselling failures'. Other studies have indicated that a better outcome is achieved for those who attend more than once (National Marriage Guidance Council 1978; Wiederkehr, Pittman and Villaroman 1981; Hunt 1985). Approximately 22 per cent of cases seen by the approved agencies in 1984–85 were single counselling sessions.

Measures of effectiveness

Defining what is meant by improvement and what is being measured is a critical issue. Deciding what is an accurate definition and measurement of the effectiveness of counselling has baffled researchers and practitioners alike (Gurman and Kniskern 1981). Clients, counsellors, researchers, the community at large and public policy-makers who fund marriage counselling services all may have different definitions of what constitutes a satisfactory or effective outcome.

For some clients, separation will be a satisfactory outcome; for others, it would be a very unsatisfactory resolution. Public policy-makers and taxpayers may only consider reconciliation or remaining married a satisfactory outcome because it reduces social and legal welfare costs. Counsellors may feel that as long as clients clarified their feelings, improved their communication and conflict resolution skills, gained in confidence and self-esteem or were able to come to a decision about their relationship, then counselling was effective whether or not the decision was to stay together or to separate.

How the objectives of marriage counselling are defined will influence whether these aims have been met. Marriage counselling as it has been defined in the *Family Law Act, 1975*, in the theoretical literature, and by the counselling agencies, emphasizes the enhancement of the marital relationship, the prevention of divorce, the achievement of personal growth and the mitigation of the consequences of separation.

However, there are few common indices to assess change in clients.

Ratings of improvement are generally related to overall satisfaction–happiness measures rather than specific measures of improvement such as improved sexual relationship or communication.

There is an absence of a universal definition of what constitutes a dysfunctional as opposed to functional marriage. L'Abate and McHenry (1983) observe that 'the marital therapist must help a couple become 'satisfied' with a decided inability to specify the exact nature of 'dissatisfaction'. Cuber and Harrof (1965) assert that there are just 'different kinds of adjustment and different concepts of marriage'. Some individuals may focus on the negative rather than positive aspects of their relationship; issues that cause conflict and distress to one couple may have little effect on another (L'Abate and McHenry 1983); the balance between costs and benefits to maintaining the relationship may vary among individuals (Udry 1981; Morgan and Scanzoni 1987).

Dallos and Aldridge (1986) point out that there are different types and levels of change, and therapists and clients are not always clear in defining what their goals and assumptions are about change desired or achieved in counselling. Gurman and Kniskern (1981) believe that the failure to distinguish between 'mediating' and 'ultimate' goals in assessing outcome criteria accounts for disagreements about the appropriateness or validity of specific measures among therapists and clients. Also, outcome measures may or may not have considered changes in goals that emerged during counselling.

Many researchers consider client self-report measures appropriate since marital satisfaction is based on subjective feelings which may or may not agree with the perceptions of others (Beck 1975; Johnson and Greenbergh 1985). Conversely, Jacobson (1978) suggests self-reports can be unreliable because clients may wish to please the therapist or to justify the time and expense of therapy. More importantly, self-report does not provide validation of actual change in behaviour or attitudes.

Jacobson (1978) emphasizes the need for observable, quantifiable measures of couples' behaviours at home or in a clinical setting coded by trained raters. However, observer ratings present the problems of consensus on what was being observed and the raters' subjective assessment of change (L'Abate and McHenry 1983). Changes in concrete behavioural categories also may not be valid indicators of change in marital satisfaction. Olson (1976) suggests multi-dimensional assessment can be based on client self-reports, therapist evaluation, independent observers and behavioural records.

The importance of reliable and valid multi-perspective assessments of change has been well documented (Beck 1975; Gurman and Kniskern 1981; Lebow 1981; L'Abate and McHenry 1983). Multiple outcome measures are necessary to determine the effect of counselling on the individual, on the couple relationship and on specific problem categories, as well as on overall marital satisfaction (Cline, Jackson, Klien, Mejia and Turner 1987). Jacobson and colleagues (1984) found while more than half of the couples who were involved in the outcome studies they analyzed improved, in about 40 per cent of improved couples, positive changes in marital satisfaction were confined to one spouse.

Five levels of assessment criteria are recommended by Olson (1976): intrapersonal (individual), interpersonal, quasi-interactional (during structured task in controlled setting), interactional (self and relationship to others), and transactional (marital or family group).

In Beck's (1975) study, counsellor and client independently rated changes on the following outcome criteria: global improvement in client's total problem situation, improvement in presenting problem sub-areas, client's approach to problem solving, changes in family relationships, and changes in individual members.

The following categories were used in an Australian National Marriage Guidance Council study (1978): marital relationship had improved and the problems had been either completely or partially solved; the relationship had not improved but the client felt that he or she had been helped personally by the counselling; no improvement in marital relationship and the client did not feel counselling had helped them in any way.

Effectiveness is frequently measured by perceived changes in marital satisfaction pre- and post-counselling. A variety of marital satisfaction scales have been used, the most common being the Lock–Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (Locke and Wallace 1959) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier 1976).

Recognizing that a satisfactory outcome might include the decision to separate, Cookerly (1976) included the criteria: divorced with good, moderate or poor outcome and married with good, moderate or poor outcome in his five-year follow-up study of marital therapy outcome. Hunt (1985) included measures to evaluate satisfaction with counselling, aspects of the counselling relationship, benefit from counselling, and ratings of the most valuable and most disappointing aspects of counselling.

There is also the need to differentiate between studies of satisfaction with the counselling experience or service itself and satisfaction with the relationship or counselling outcome. Clients may agree that counselling was helpful without feeling that it had a positive outcome for themselves or the relationship. For example, Burnett (1985) indicated that nearly 90 per cent of respondents believed counselling was helpful regardless of the outcome which for 32 per cent did not include a perceived improvement in the relationship.

Wiederkehr (1981) found that a reported positive outcome was closely related to the type of presenting problem. Over 50 per cent of clients who had been left by a partner claimed counselling had not changed anything whereas those who came with sexual, communication and joint problems benefited most. Similarly, Hunt (1985) reported that the majority of people who felt negative about counselling at the time of follow-up were separated or divorced, or unhappy about the current state of their marriage. The level of commitment on the part of each partner has been identified as a critical variable in predicting improvement (Sabatelli 1988).

Timing of counselling also has been found to be an important variable related to outcome. The effectiveness of counselling interventions appears modified by the state of conflict or deterioration in the relationship by the time clients approach counselling (Hunt 1985; Cramb and Hills 1982).

Criteria to measure deterioration as well as improvement related to counselling are necessary. A number of studies suggest that the rate of deterioration is negligible, usually within the 5–10 per cent range (Jacobson and colleagues 1984).

Spontaneous remission or the amelioration of problems over time without recourse to treatment is another concern: Beck (1976) concluded that short-term change in the absence of treatment was a rare occurrence; Gurman (1978) claimed the phenomenon probably did not exist.

Therapist variables

Therapist values may influence the choice of outcome measures. How therapists define a satisfactory marital relationship as well as their assumptions about the nature of marriage and men's and women's roles will affect the selection of outcome criteria and evaluation of the effectiveness of counselling. If, for example, intimacy, sexual openness, egalitarianism, and autonomy are important values to therapists, then the success of counselling will be measured against achievement of these criteria (Strupp 1986). Criticism also has been levelled at marital and family therapy for promoting a traditional stereotyped view of male and female roles in marriage (Jacobson 1983; Chapman and Park 1984).

Dissimilar value orientations between therapists and clients were reported by Khan and Cross (1985) who surveyed the personal and moral value systems of 454 mental health professionals and 431 clients. The health professionals placed more stress on values associated with individual growth, self-direction and tolerance in areas of sexual behaviour whereas clients emphasized self-control and restraints on sexual behaviour.

According to Kantor and Kupferman (1985) 'family therapists differ in their use of self, in their focus on past or present, in their attention to inner or outer realities, and in their choices of which information to consider'. How a therapist defines what is wrong in the relationship will influence the processes used to alter these behaviours or attitudes (Smyrnios, Schultz, Smyrnios and Kirkby 1986).

Therapist and client definition of improvement or deterioration in the relationship also may differ (Sirles 1982; Dallas and Aldridge 1986). Beck (1975) notes that clients reported improvement in most areas more than counsellors did. Conversely, Hunt (1985) records more optimistic counsellor than client assessments of benefits from counselling.

The relationship between the client and counsellor, the therapeutic bond, is considered a significant factor in client satisfaction and therapy outcome. Qualities of warmth, empathy, and genuineness have consistently been associated with client satisfaction (Beck 1975; Gurman and Kniskern 1986; Orlinsky and Howard 1986; Shepard 1978; Hunt 1985). The therapist's

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ability to present treatment in a manner congruent with client expectations and experience has been related to treatment outcome (Crane, Griffin and Hill 1986) as is the establishment of a 'therapeutic alliance', the degree of understanding and agreement on the goals of counselling (Hunt 1985). Kantor and Kupferman (1985) assert that the clients also 'interview' the therapist and decide what it is safe to disclose, whether the therapists' values or background and personal experiences will enable them to understand their situation, and whether the style of therapy is comfortable.

Conclusions about the correlation between sex of the counsellor and client satisfaction and outcome are inconsistent (Beck 1976; Wiederkehr *et al.* 1983; Hunt 1985). Few studies that look at counsellor gender as a variable have controlled for other important factors such as training and experience. Beutler, Crago and Arizmendi (1986) found counsellor attitudes towards sexual roles to be more important than gender. A non-stereotyped approach was the most facilitative. However, client preference for a particular gender may influence outcome.

Client variables

Client variables such as status of the relationship, socio-economic status, religion, personality attributes, life-cycle stage, motivation and nature and intensity of the problem can affect outcome (L'Abate and McHenry 1983, Sabatelli 1984). The importance of couple characteristics has been emphasized in the outcomes of divorce mediation and therapy studies. For example, Sprenkle and Storm (1983) conclude from their review of 22 studies that couples with high levels of conflict, continued attachment and who approached help late in the divorce process are less suitable for mediation and conciliation treatments.

External variables

Few studies account for other factors such as improved financial resources, birth of a baby, a new job, less interference from in-laws or reading a self-help book that could contribute to the outcome and confound the measurement. Beck and Jones (1973) and Burnett (1985) report that more than half the clients considered events outside of counselling had contributed to change. In an effort to evaluate the effects of behavioural marital therapy two years after treatment, Jacobson, Schmaling and Holtzworth-Munroe (1987) concluded that stressful life events subsequent to therapy intruded on the gains made earlier in therapy.

Follow-up Studies

Most marital therapy research is based on evaluation at the termination of counselling. It is obviously desirable to follow up clients to see whether the effects of marriage counselling survive longer term. Follow-up research is, however, confounded by concern with invasion of privacy, difficulty in locating clients, and accounting for intervening variables and changes in the client's environment. Six months to a year is considered an optimum time for follow-up to avoid the 'rainbow' effect where apparent gains are short-lived or the cumulative effect of external factors such as moving into a different lifecycle stage that may overwhelm counselling effects (Beck 1975).

In one five-year follow-up study, Cookerly (1980) found a significant number of clients treated conjointly were still married while fewer of those treated in non-conjoint methods were still married. Two years after marital therapy, Jacobson, Schmaling and Holtzworth-Munroe (1987) found that 30 per cent of couples who had initially shown improvement had relapsed.

Hunt (1985), of the National Marriage Guidance Council in England, interviewed 51 clients from 42 marriages and their marriage counsellors up to a year after the termination of counselling. Of the 33 couples living together at the beginning of counselling, 21 were still together at follow-up, only 12 of whom were happy with the situation. Of the 21 couples who ended up separated or divorced, only three people said this was a satisfactory outcome for themselves (although their partner may have felt differently). In terms of client satisfaction, Hunt reported 49 per cent of clients felt positive about the counselling they had received, 10 per cent had mixed feelings and 41 per cent felt negative. Nearly 50 per cent stated they had benefited only marginally or not at all from the counselling, 4 per cent were neutral, and 46 per cent felt they had benefited to some degree or a great deal. The majority of those who were negative about counselling were separated, divorced or unhappy in the continuing marriage.

Cramb and Hills (1982) conducted a follow-up study of New Zealand Marriage Guidance Council clients. Of the one-third of clients who were located for the follow-up (79/159), a majority were more satisfied than dissatisfied with the outcome and showed improvement on marital satisfaction and wellbeing measures. Few demographic or social characteristic variables were included in the analysis.

Snyder and Wills (1989) conducted a follow-up study of 79 married intact couples treated with either behavioural marital or insight-oriented therapy comparing their results on several marital and global satisfaction and individual psychological measures with a no-treatment group. The proportion of couples showing significant change ranged between 62–73 per cent for both interventions compared to 15 per cent for the no-treatment couples. In 40–45 per cent of cases both spouses showed significant improvement compared to 10 per cent of the no-treatment couples. Using a more stringent measure both statistically significant improvement and change from dysfunctional to functional status relative to intake, 43–50 per cent of couples met this criteria.

Cline *et al.* (1987) looked at improvement six months after marital therapy in 52 couples (sample = 88) on the Marital Communication Inventory (MCI), the Marital Content Satisfaction Scale (MCSS) which measures spousal satisfaction with partner's role performance, and the Locke-Wallace global measure of marital satisfaction. For these individuals, 54 per cent improved on the MCI, 45 per cent on MCSS and 44 per cent on the Locke-Wallace marital satisfaction. However when both husband and wife together were assessed for improvement, lower levels were attained: 32 per cent on the MCI, 18 per cent on the MCSS and 25 per cent on the Locke-Wallace.

Australian Studies

Australian studies have been limited. Each year the Attorney-General's Department collects counselling outcome information from all the constituent marriage counselling agencies funded by the Department. Outcome information is collected at the termination of counselling. In 1986–87, 83 per cent of male and 89 per cent of female clients rated counselling outcomes as positive. Counsellors gave an overall positive rating of 77 per cent. In 30 per cent of cases, clients did not report an outcome response (Annual Report, Attorney-General's Department 1987–88).

Huppert (1975) conducted a follow-up study by telephone of 90 Marriage Guidance Council of New South Wales clients who were able to be contacted or agreed to be interviewed. Two-thirds rated their marriage as 'good or improved' and indicated an improved change in personal happiness. Two-thirds of the clients felt they had been helped by counselling, 30 per cent indicated counselling had not been helpful or made little difference, and 2 per cent felt it had made things worse.

Using clients from the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria, Eckersley and Garrow (1976) concluded that at four to six months after counselling, 70 per cent of the 93 clients who agreed to participate felt they had been helped. Separation occurred in one-third of cases where couples had contemplated separation from the beginning. Approximately half of those couples who had separated felt they had received personal help despite the unwanted outcome.

Wiederkehr *et al.* (1981) followed up 193 clients (33 per cent of the target sample) of the Marriage Guidance Council of New South Wales at up to 18 months after counselling had terminated. Of those who were married and living together at the time of counselling, 77 per cent were still married at follow-up while 23 per cent had separated or divorced. Of those who had been separated at the time of counselling, 21 per cent had reconciled and 58 per cent had divorced. At follow-up, 61 per cent felt positively about the counselling outcome, 15 per cent felt better in some ways and worse in others, and 2 per cent felt things were worse. Increased positive responses were found at follow-up when compared to the responses at termination. For those who were in a relationship at the time of counselling, 30 per cent indicated counselling had improved the relationship, 33 per cent had been helped individually, 31 per cent felt it had not changed anything and 5 per cent believed it had made things worse. Positive outcome was related to the type of presenting problem. For those who had been left by a partner, 50 per cent claimed counselling had not made any change.

Sheppard (1978) interviewed 131 clients of two Victorian agencies to examine whether client satisfaction was affected by the level of counsellor professionalism. He found no difference in levels of satisfaction between counselling by professionals and trained non-professionals. The personal therapist qualities of warmth and empathy were the significant factors.

Szuty (1983) investigated the counselling outcomes of 70 clients of the Canberra Marriage Counselling Service. Six months after termination of counselling, two-thirds of clients felt that counselling had been helpful. Compared to 90 per cent of clients who perceived their relationship to have been strained or unhappy at the time they commenced counselling, only one-third of the recontacted clients still felt their relationship was strained or unhappy at the time of follow-up. Burnett (1985) looked at the effectiveness of counselling 10 to 26 months after counselling for a sample of 67 clients at the Anglican Marriage Guidance Council in Victoria. Since the study was concerned with the lasting effectiveness of counselling, the sample was limited to couples seen jointly for at least six sessions and who had indicated a positive outcome at the counselling termination. At the termination of counselling, 89 per cent of the sample believed counselling had been personally helpful, 76 per cent thought it was helpful to their partner, and 68 per cent thought it had improved the relationship. At the time of follow-up, 63 per cent of respondents felt the gains had been maintained and 73 per cent were satisfied with the current state of their relationship. Over 60 per cent of clients indicated that counselling had made a significant contribution to the current state of the relationship.

Burns (1980) and Wolcott (1986) looked at the experiences of divorced individuals who had been to marriage counselling. Approximately one-third of clients in both studies who had sought counselling found the counselling helpful. Not surprisingly, the higher proportion of dissatisfaction with counselling among these clients was associated with the final outcome of divorce, an outcome not desired by many of the respondents.

All marriage counselling studies (Burns 1980; Brannen and Collard 1982; Cramb and Hills 1982; Hunt 1985; Wolcott 1986) have found that the most helpful aspects of counselling reported by clients included: increased understanding of the problems, clarification of feelings and the provision of emotional support in a neutral atmosphere. Common complaints about the counselling process centred on the lack of more direct counsellor advice or guidance.

In conclusion, the major methodological shortcomings reviewed in the literature emphasize the difficulty of precisely defining effectiveness in terms of counselling and of developing valid and reliable measures of such effectiveness as counselling outcomes. The uniqueness of each couple's needs and characteristics is considered to contribute to this dilemma.

5

WHO USES MARRIAGE COUNSELLING?

This chapter was written by Peter McDonald, AIFS Deputy Director (Research)

Not all users of marriage counselling services are married or separated from a marriage, but most are. The Special Services Branch of the Attorney-General's Department has supplied the Institute with Tables showing the characteristics of all new-case clients registered as attending marriage counselling in the month in which the Institute's survey was conducted. The relationship status of these people is set out in Table 4. Just under 80 per cent of clients were married or separated from a marriage. About 14 per cent were engaged, in a de facto relationship, or separated from a de facto relationship. The remaining 6 per cent were single, widowed or divorced and hence not in readily identifiable relationships and, perhaps, not attending about a particular relationship. People in the last category were asked not to complete the Institute questionnaire and so the single, widowed and divorced constituted only 3 per cent of the sample.

Table 4: The current relationship status of marriage counselling clients, new cases, 13 October–19 November, 1987

Relationship status	Men %	Women %
Married, remarried	57.5	59.2
Separated from a marriage	21.8	18.5
In de facto relationship	9.5	8.3
Separated, de facto	3.1	2.9
Engaged	3.3	2.5
Never married, single	3.8	4.9
Divorced	0.9	3.2
Widowed, other	0.1	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0
(n)	(1255)	(1803)

Source: Attorney-General's Department, Special Services Branch.

Comparison With the General Population

Although several agencies have conducted individual agency studies (for example, Wiederkehr, Pittman and Villaroman 1981; Greenway and Lacar-Villaroman 1983), prior to 1987, the Attorney-General's Department did not collect information from the agencies on demographic details of clients, so it has not been possible to compare their characteristics with that of the general population on a national basis.

This chapter compares the characteristics of the sampling frame for the Institute study sample with that of the general population on a number of demographic dimensions.

We would not expect that marriage counselling clients would have the same relationship status as the general population because they are defined and selected on the basis of relationship status. There is no point, therefore, in comparing the marital status distribution of clients with that of Australians as a whole. For the same reason, when comparing other characteristics of clients with the general population, we need to take account of the fact that clients are concentrated among persons living in or recently separated from a relationship. The 1986 Census of Population provides the best reference point against which we can examine the characteristics of clients. Unfortunately, the Census does not identify all de facto couples nor any persons who have separated from a de facto relationship. The best that can be done is to compare the characteristics of counselling clients who were married or separated from a marriage with married and separated persons in the Census. These clients, as Table 4 shows, constitute about 80 per cent of all marriage counselling clients.

Age

Among the married and separated population, marriage counselling clients, not unexpectedly, are highly selective of younger persons. (Table 5). Because the age distributions of counselling clients and the general population are so widely divergent, when comparing any other characteristic, we should allow for the possible effects of age differences upon the comparison. Consequently, in the comparisons which follow, the Census population has been weighted so that its age distribution is the same as that of marriage counselling clients. This means that any observed difference is free of any impact of age differences.

Country of birth

Using the methodology described above Table 6 shows that Australian-born persons are over-represented in marriage counselling, whereas persons born in Europe and Asia are under-represented. Statistically, the differences

Table 5: The age distributions of marriage counselling clients and the general population, married and separated men and women.

	Men		Women	
Age group	Counselling %	Census %	Counselling %	Census %
Less than 30	23.7	12.5	32.9	18.8
30–39	45.9	26.5	44.5	27.7
40–49	23.5	21.5	17.8	20.3
50 and over	6.9	39.5	4.8	33.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: AIFS Pre-Counselling Survey, 1987; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, one per cent sample tape.

between the two distributions are highly significant (p<0.001 for both men and women). When collapsed to two categories, English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries of birth, the differences remain highly significant. Nevertheless, the differences in Table 6 are not large in absolute terms, and marriage counselling could be said to be catering for many persons of non-English-speaking backgrounds. High levels of statistical significance are, in part, a product of large sample size.

Table 6: A comparison of the countries of birth of marriage counselling clients and the general population.

	Men		Women	
Country of birth	Counselling %	Census %	Counselling %	Census %
Australia	77.5	70.4	76.8	72.2
New Zealand	1.2	2.0	1.9	2.1
United Kingdom	9.5	10.2	9.6	9.4
Europe	6.8	10.2	5.5	8.8
Asia, Middle East	2.6	5.2	2.8	5.4
Other	2.4	1.9	2.5	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n)	(956)		(1338)	

Source: Attorney-General's Department, Special Services Branch; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, one per cent sample tape.

Any comparison made here begs the question: does under-representation of a particular group in marriage counselling mean that, in some way, marriage counselling services are not attractive to that group, or does it mean that the group has less need for marriage counselling? Specific to Table 6, are marriage counselling services not catering as well for persons of non-English-speaking backgrounds, or do such persons have less need for marriage counselling? As the data do not answer this question, only inferential conclusions can be drawn. These are that marriage counselling agencies may need to examine alternative ways to deliver their services to people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. If language is the obstacle, then this might be addressed through use of counsellors with appropriate language competency; if culture is the obstacle, different delivery systems, such as the mediation of an extended family member, may need to be considered; if integration into the broader Australian community is the obstacle, then perhaps marriage counselling agencies may need to target services and professionals ('gatekeepers') who work with people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Period of residence in Australia

Among those born outside Australia, marriage counselling is over-represented among those of longer-term residence and under-represented among those resident less than five years (Table 7). The differences are again statistically significant ($p<0.005$ for men and $p<0.025$ for women). As there is little reason to expect that those with longer residence in Australia are more likely to have marriage problems, the conclusions drawn about persons of non-English-speaking backgrounds appear apposite.

Table 7: A comparison of period of residence in Australia of marriage counselling clients and the general population, persons born outside Australia.

	Men		Women	
Period of residence	Counselling %	Census %	Counselling %	Census %
Less than 5 years	4.7	13.3	7.9	15.2
5–9 years	14.7	14.1	15.1	15.2
10–14 years	10.0	12.5	14.7	13.2
15–19 years	20.9	19.0	17.4	18.4
20 years and over	49.7	41.1	44.9	38.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n)	(191)		(265)	

Sources: Attorney-General's Department, Special Services Branch; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, one per cent sample tape.

Tertiary qualifications

Regarding qualifications, the only valid comparison that can be made between counselling and Census data is of the proportion of each group who held a degree or diploma. For men, 17.2 per cent of counselling clients held a degree or diploma compared with 14.0 per cent of the general population. For women, 15.2 per cent of counselling clients held a degree or diploma compared with 11.4 per cent of the general population. Thus clients were more likely to have tertiary qualifications, and the observed differences were highly significant statistically ($p<0.005$ for men and $p<0.001$ for women; $n=941$ for men and $n=1319$ for women). Like country of birth, however, despite high statistical significance, it could be said that the differences are not large in absolute terms. That is, in no way could it be said that marriage counselling is a service for the educated only.

Labour force status

Table 8 shows that, for men, there is virtually no difference between clients and the general population regarding their labour force participation. Marriage counselling clients were a little more likely to be unemployed ($p<0.01$, $n=958$). For women also, differences in labour force participation were small, with clients being more likely than the general population to be employed rather than being out of the labour force ($p<0.025$, $n=1318$).

Table 8: A comparison of the labour force status of marriage counselling clients and the general population.

	Men		Women	
	Counselling	Census	Counselling	Census
Labour force status	%	%	%	%
Employed	88.5	88.2	56.9	52.8
Unemployed	6.7	5.1	3.6	4.0
Not in labour force	4.8	6.7	39.5	43.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n)	(958)		(1318)	

Sources: Attorney-General's Department, Special Services Branch; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, one per cent sample tape.

Among employed women, marriage counselling clients were more likely to be working full-time. With 52.0 per cent of employed female clients working full-time compared with 44.6 per cent in the general population, this difference was statistically highly significant ($p<0.001$, $n=750$). In making this comparison, marriage counselling clients who said they were in casual employment were considered to be working part-time. If some casual workers were employed full-time, the difference between clients and the general population would be even greater than observed.

The greater use of marriage counselling services by women employed full-time can indicates either that these women had a greater need for marriage counselling or that they had a greater willingness to use the service.

Occupation

Classification of occupation in the Census is based on a somewhat detailed description made by the respondent and a very detailed system of classification (ASCO: Australian Standard Classification of Occupations). The ASCO two-digit code was used here because of its availability on the

Census, one per cent sample tape. On the marriage counselling form, clients in the labour force are asked to specify one of five broad groupings as their usual occupation. In making a comparison of the two data sources, these two systems must be assimilated. As this process will not be perfect, the differences between clients and the general population shown in Table 9 need to be interpreted cautiously. The ASCO two-digit codes assumed to correspond to the five marriage counselling categories are shown in brackets in the Table. People with inadequately described occupations were not included. The marriage counselling category 'services worker' presents the greatest difficulty for comparison. For example, a nurse may describe herself as a service worker, but in the Census classification used here, nurses are included in 'professional and technical'.

Table 9: A comparison of the occupations of marriage counselling clients and the general population, persons in the labour force.

	Men		Women	
Occupation	Clients %	Census %	Clients %	Census %
Professional/technical (Codes 8–24)	23.5	21.3	27.8	20.8
Managerial/administrator (Codes 1–7)	14.7	16.1	8.5	8.6
Clerk/salesperson (Codes 35–48)	10.7	14.7	39.5	46.0
Transport/communications/ services worker (Codes 49–54)	17.5	12.6	12.4	7.6
Tradesperson/labourer/ process worker (Codes 25–34, 55–60)	33.6	35.3	11.7	17.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n)	(880)		(855)	

Sources: Attorney-General's Department, Special Services Branch; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, one per cent sample tape.

Despite these difficulties of comparison, some conclusions can be drawn. The differences for men, although statistically highly significant ($p<0.001$), are relatively small in absolute terms. Clerks and salespersons are somewhat under-represented in marriage counselling while transport, communications and services workers are over-represented.

The differences for women are larger and statistically highly significant ($p<0.001$). Professional, technical, transport, communications and services workers are highly over-represented among marriage counselling clients. Clerks, salespersons, trades and production process workers are heavily under-represented. This is clearly a split which corresponds to socio-economic status, that is, among women in the labour force, those in higher level jobs are more likely to use marriage counselling. Taking this and drawing from the conclusions of the previous two sets of demographic characteristics, it can be concluded that marriage counselling is heavily over-represented among women who are in the labour force and work full-time in higher level jobs. It can be asked: do these women need marriage counselling more than other women or are they more open to taking advantage of marriage counselling services? The data cannot answer this question.

Income level of men

Comparisons of income level can only be made for men. Both the Census and the marriage counselling form obtained gross annual income in specific income ranges. Unfortunately the ranges do not correspond, although some points in the range are the same. A convenient point which corresponds in both data collections is $22 000, roughly equal to male average weekly earnings at the time of the Census. A further difficulty, however, is the time difference between the two collections, 30 June 1986 for the Census and October–November 1987 for the marriage counselling statistics.

Forty-eight per cent of male marriage counselling clients had incomes under $22 000 compared to 62 per cent of men in the general population. Of this difference of 14 percentage points, the time difference of the two collections of data would account for about 6 percentage points. Thus, we can safely conclude that higher income men are over-represented among men who attend marriage counselling. This perhaps mirrors the above conclusion about high use of marriage counselling by women in higher level jobs.

Nevertheless, it must be stated again that the observed differences are not great in absolute terms; that is, that marriage counselling is certainly used by numerous men with low incomes.

Religion

Table 10 shows that Catholics and persons with no religion are heavily over-represented among marriage counselling clients, Anglican/Protestant persons are slightly under-represented, while persons of other religions (Muslim, Orthodox, Jewish) are heavily under-represented. The differences for both men and women are statistically highly significant ($p<0.001$) and relatively large in absolute terms. Explanations must again consider whether observed differences are due to differences in the need for the service or the ability of people to avail themselves of the service. As marriage counselling is often delivered by Christian, particularly Catholic, agencies, the latter explanation is likely to be important.

Year of first marriage

Both the Census and the marriage counselling form contained a question relating to year of first marriage. An adjustment has been made to the

Table 10: A comparison of the religions of marriage counselling clients and the general population.

	Men		Women	
Religion	Counselling %	Census %	Counselling %	Census %
Catholic	30.1	24.2	34.8	26.1
Anglican/Protestant	40.7	42.3	41.0	45.4
Other religion	8.1	17.7	8.7	16.9
No religion	21.1	15.8	15.5	11.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n)	(820)		(1147)	

Sources: Attorney-General's Department, Special Services Branch; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, one per cent sample tape.

marriage counselling data to eliminate marriages after the date of the Census, 30 June 1986. As Table 11 shows the distributions of year of first marriage are very similar for both men and women and the differences are not statistically significant. It should be remembered that the Census data have been weighted to remove age differences between the two data sources. As age is likely to be highly correlated with year of first marriage, the result obtained is not unexpected. Nevertheless, the similarity of year of first marriage (when age is controlled) implies that counselling clients are representative of the general population.

Table 11: A comparison of the year of first marriage of marriage counselling clients and the general population.

	Men		Women	
Year of first marriage	Counselling %	Census %	Counselling %	Census %
Before 1965	12.7	13.5	15.4	15.1
1965–1969	15.2	14.8	14.6	14.6
1970–1974	22.8	20.9	22.2	21.6
1975–1979	19.3	20.9	19.0	20.7
1980–1984	24.5	23.2	24.2	21.9
1985–30 June 1986	5.6	6.6	4.6	6.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n)	(797)		(1134)	

Sources: Attorney-General's Department, Special Services Branch; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, one per cent sample tape.

Number of children

Comparison of the Census data and marriage counselling data on numbers of children is difficult. The Census records the number of children of a woman who are still living, but contains a high not-stated component (6 per cent) who may be either women with no living children or women who simply failed to answer the question. In the following analysis, the not-stated component is presumed to consist entirely of women who failed to answer the question, that is, their responses have been eliminated. On the other hand, the marriage counselling data do not record any children who are not living with either of their parents, essentially older children who have left home.

Despite these difficulties, some of the differences shown in Table 12 are so large that it is most unlikely that they can be caused by these measurement problems. The Table suggests a heavy over-representation of one-child families among counselling clients and under-representation of couples without children or those with three or more children. The non-inclusion in the counselling data of children who are not living with either parent will tend to reduce the number of children of clients relative to the Census. While this could explain much of the apparent under-representation of couples with three or more children, it is likely to make the differences for couples with one child and no children even greater than those shown in the Table. It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that couples without children are heavily under-represented in marriage counselling whereas those with one child are heavily over-represented. Perhaps this reflects the often-made observation that the period following the birth of the first child is a major pressure point in marriages.

Table 12: A comparison of the number of children still living for marriage counselling clients and the general population, females.

Number of children still living	Counselling %	Census %
0	11.3	17.1
1	28.7	15.9
2	36.8	35.5
3 or more	23.3	31.5
Total	100.0	100.0

Sources: AIFS Pre-Counselling Survey, 1987; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, one per cent sample tape.

Note: As the counselling data are derived from the AIFS survey rather than from the full Attorney-General's statistics, differences observable in the table may be partially due to survey response rates.

State or Territory

The final comparison relates to people's location. For the Census, the data relate to the location of the household in which the person was staying at the time of the Census. For counselling clients, the data relate to the location of the agency where the counselling took place. Border crossing for counselling, therefore, may be a cause of difference between the two data sources.

As this is likely to be a major problem only for the ACT, data for the ACT are combined with New South Wales.

Table 13: A comparison of the state or territory of marriage counselling clients and the general population.

	Men		Women	
State or Territory	Counselling %	Census %	Counselling %	Census %
NSW & ACT	35.8	35.4	38.2	35.4
Victoria	19.8	25.8	16.5	26.0
Queensland	21.8	16.6	21.8	16.6
South Australia	8.2	8.8	9.0	8.8
Western Australia	9.2	9.4	8.5	9.4
Tasmania	3.3	2.9	4.1	2.9
Northern Territory	1.9	1.1	1.9	0.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n)	(978)		(1361)	

Sources: Attorney-General's Department, Special Services Branch; 1986 Census of Population and Housing, Table C08.

The differences by State or Territory between counselling clients and the Census are quite marked and statistically highly significant ($p<0.001$ for both men and women). The striking differences are the heavy over-representation of Queensland among clients and the heavy under-representation of Victoria. On a smaller scale, the Northern Territory and Tasmania are also heavily over-represented among clients. The reasons for these substantial State differences have not been further investigated because of restrictions on the terms of reference of the evaluation.

Summary

This comparison of marriage counselling clients with the general population has shown that the following groups are above or below average users of marriage counselling:

Above average	***Below average***
younger people	older people
people born in Australia	people born in mainland Europe & Asia
people with an English-speaking country of birth	
people with non-English-speaking country of birth	

among migrants, those resident in Australia for more than 20 years	among migrants, those resident in Australia for less than 5 years
people with a degree or a diploma	people who did not have degree or a diploma
employed women	women not in the labour force
among employed women, those working full-time	among employed women, those working part-time
among employed women, those in professional, technical and services jobs	
among employed women, those in clerical, sales, trades and production process jobs	
men with incomes above male average weekly earnings,	men with incomes below male average weekly earnings
Catholics and people with no religion	religions other than Catholic, Anglican or Protestant
women with one child	women with no children
people living in Queensland, Northern Territory and Tasmania	people living in Victoria

With perhaps the single exception of the below average use of marriage counselling in the State of Victoria, the above or below average use of marriage counselling services is not startling in absolute terms. While there is a deficit of recent, non-English-speaking migrants and a surplus of people of upper socio-economic status, particularly women, marriage counselling clearly caters for substantial proportions of migrants and people of lower socio-economic status. With a little more emphasis upon the deficit groups noted above, marriage counselling would be broadly representative of Australians in general.

PLEASE NOTE: on page 49, '*people of non-English-speaking country of birth*' should appear under the right-hand column entitled '*Below average*'.

PLEASE NOTE*:* on page 50, '*among employed women, those in clerical, sales, trades and production process jobs*' should appear under the right-hand column entitled '*Below average*'.

PART TWO

THE PRE-COUNSELLING SURVEY RESULTS

6

RESEARCH DESIGN, PROCEDURE AND RESPONSE RATES

Designed to evaluate the effectiveness of marriage counselling, the study faced the dilemma of what constitutes a satisfactory outcome of marriage counselling. Satisfaction with outcome depends on the definition of the goals of the service which vary from client to client, counsellor, society generally, and funding bodies such as the Attorney-General's Department. In other words, one's frame of reference, to paraphrase Hunt (1985), will determine how one defines a good outcome.

The difficulty in evaluating marriage counselling occurs because its functions are contradictory. The role of marriage counselling is to assist with both 'mending and ending relationships' (Hunt 1985). Clients themselves are often in conflict about what their goals are in seeking counselling. Those concerned with the social issues and costs of increasing divorce rates and ensuing welfare costs will perceive a satisfactory outcome to be remaining in the relationship. However, when separation is the issue, in addition to reconciliation the other major goal of marriage counselling may well be assisting couples to separate with a minimum amount of pain. Ideally clients should feel more able to relate to each other less destructively, to stay connected in their role as parents when there are children involved, and to achieve increased satisfaction with life.

In evaluating the efficacy of counselling, studies of marriage counselling tend to report levels of individual satisfaction rather than the 'joint' satisfaction of the couple. Counsellors perceive the outcome as satisfactory if clients gain insight, have made decisions they feel are right for them, and finish counselling feeling more integrated and happier and able to relate less destructively (Hunt 1985, Kaslow 1987, Hartin 1988). Hunt (1985) raises the issue of who is the client in marriage counselling: the one who seeks counselling when only one half of a relationship is involved, or both individuals when they seek counselling together, or 'is the relationship always deemed to be the client'? She goes on to argue: 'If the relationship is the client, then the outcome needs to be considered in terms of what happened within that relationship and in terms of who defines the improvement in or the quality of that relationship' (p. 13).

For the most part, the individual is the unit of analysis in the present study; where data from both partners are available, couples will be looked at. In this way, while concentrating on the individual client, the study will also touch on the issue of couple benefits and satisfaction with marriage counselling, and enable us to compare and contrast individual and couple results.

It is widely acknowledged that wives have lower marital satisfaction than husbands and tend to initiate the separation in the majority of cases. The majority of marriage counselling clients and counsellors are also female. Reiger (1987) has suggested that counselling or the therapeutic approach can be characterised as the 'professionalising of traditional feminine skills of mutual support, empathy and emotional expressiveness'. Some writers suggest that the whole counselling approach is more feminine than masculine in orientation as it is based on talking through problems and gaining insight, rather than instrumentally oriented, where concrete suggestions are made and advice given. This suggests that counselling is likely to be more effective for women than for men, which may explain why women are more likely than men to initiate counselling. As the main focus of marriage counselling is the relationship, and if counselling is more effective with women than men, this raises questions about the definition of effectiveness.

Aims

Since the major aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of marriage counselling, a two-stage longitudinal design was used, consisting of a pre-counselling and post-counselling survey.

The initial stage of the study obtained a profile of marriage counselling clients. Assessments were made of client expectations of counselling, their pathways to seeking counselling and their individual general life satisfaction. Assessments of several dimensions of their relationship were also made — the level of consensus in the relationship, a global relationship satisfaction measure, their level of commitment to the relationship, their estimate of how likely it was that the relationship would continue, and an estimate of how they perceived the consequences of separation.

The second phase of the study, conducted eight months after counselling, looked at the effectiveness of counselling and outcomes of counselling. In addition to using repeated measures from the pre-counselling survey, several perspectives of effectiveness were included as measured by clients' perceptions of change and improvement in their relationship, for themselves personally and in the problems brought to counselling. Satisfaction with the counselling experience and outcomes was also measured.

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In summary, from the *pre-counselling* survey, the aims of the study were to determine:

- Who uses marriage counselling agencies;
- Why clients come to counselling;
- What are client's expectations of marriage counselling agencies;
- Whether these differ according to the client's individual and relationship characteristics;
- What the pathways to marriage counselling for clients are;
- Who initiates counselling;
- Who refers people to marriage counselling.

From the *post-counselling* survey, the aims were to determine:

- What impact marriage counselling has on changes in individual characteristics, such as self-esteem and sense of wellbeing;
- What impact marriage counselling has on changes in relationship characteristics such as, status, satisfaction, consensus, level of commitment, confidence of continuation, and the costs and benefits of continuing the relationship.

The study's aims were to determine how effective counselling was for individuals, their relationships and problem resolution. The study also aimed to determine in what way clients were assisted by counselling, and how they viewed the experience of the counselling process, including satisfaction with how counselling helped them individually, helped their relationship, and helped them solve the problems they came to counselling about.

This study has attempted to answer elements of Beck's (1975) often posed questions 'Is marital counselling effective? With whom, with what problems, by what methods of assessment, within what time frame . . .?' However, a mailed survey with limited scope for individual expression of opinion and no opportunity for probing by the researcher for meaning and interpretation, can present only one dimension. The inherent complexity of human relationships with their multiplicity of expectations, hopes, options and restraints can only be touched upon. The clients in our study came to counselling each with their own definition of their problems and concerns and hopes for their resolution or amelioration. Those together and those separated, men and women, all came with their own perception of reality, not always shared with each other — or perhaps, the researcher.

Counselling, too, is an intricate, sometimes convoluted process, bent on clarifying often inchoate thoughts and feelings, modifying behaviours, providing an alternative view of situations, and imparting skills to improve human relationships.

While common themes emerge, the individuality of each person's experience is also revealed. The very private nature of intimate relationships and how they prosper or fail can only be partially unveiled in this broad brushstroke of the effectiveness of counselling in assisting this process.

Measurement

When clients seek marriage counselling they are often distressed, and for this reason the study attempted to be as unobtrusive and non-threatening as possible. Information collected in the pre-counselling survey was therefore kept to a minimum. (Copies of both the pre-counselling and post-counselling survey questionnaires are included as Appendix 1. Details of scales used in the analysis are included in Appendix 2)

To gain some measure of general life satisfaction, 17 items from the Life Satisfaction Scale used by Headey and Wearing (1981) and Weston (1986) were chosen. This scale has been used in Australia since the late 1970s and the results over time appear consistent. Use of this scale enables a comparison of the marriage counselling sample with the general population on life satisfaction measures. Items selected for use related to standard of living, relationship, and personal feelings of self-worth. Two factor-based scales were created: a twelve-item wellbeing scale (alpha reliability .877 for the pre-counselling measure, alpha reliability .908 for the post-counselling survey), and a five-item self-esteem measure (alpha reliability pre-counselling survey .864, post-counselling alpha .904). In addition to these scales, marital satisfaction was looked at and compared pre- and post-counselling.

A measure from the Headey and Wearing Life Satisfaction Scale was included to obtain a 'measure of marital or relationship satisfaction'. To obtain a measure of marital consensus a scale based on part of the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale was included. This provides measures of level of affection within the relationship and also a measure of consensus on major relationship issues. A ten item, marital consensus scale was created with an alpha reliability in the pre-counselling survey of .832 and post-counselling alpha .889.

As Sabatelli (1988) points out, research into marital adjustment and satisfaction has 'obscured the importance of the need to develop measures of other concepts, such as commitment, dependence, perceived marital alternatives and barriers to the dissolution of a marriage'. In this study an attempt has been made to get some measure of these dimensions. Items on commitment to the relationship, perceived likelihood of dissolution of the relationship, and a measure of the consequences of separation which looks at how much better or worse life would be without the relationship were included. This 'consequences' scale is a four-item scale with an alpha reliability of .64 in the pre-counselling study and .68 in the post-counselling study. The last three measures were based on items taken from a survey of families and households in the United States (Bumpass 1987).

Procedure

Directors of all the approved marriage counselling agencies were contacted by letter requesting their assistance with the study. Counsellors were provided with letters explaining the study and instructions for conducting the study. Agencies were paid ten dollars for each case interview to offset the expenses incurred in participating in the study.

Of the then 23 approved marriage counselling agencies, two agencies did not participate because they were in the middle of administrative reorganisation.

In order to reduce the time the study would take from the counselling interview, the newly revised Attorney-General's Department forms were used to collect demographic and other counselling process information. Agencies were contacted by the Attorney-General's Department confirming the use of these information sheets by the Institute. The Attorney-General's Department was responsible for collection of the data forms and relevant data were sent to the Institute in computerised format.

All new clients who approached the marriage counselling agencies for the first time between 13 October and 19 November 1987 were asked by their counsellors to take part in the Institute's study. Clients who were not in any relationship or were not attending counselling about a relationship were excluded since the study's objectives were related to the aims of marriage counselling as defined in the *Family Law Act*. Clients who agreed to participate in the study signed a consent form giving the Institute permission to contact them again at a later date. Clients were assured in a letter handed to them by the counsellor, that participation was entirely voluntary and would not affect the receipt of counselling at the agency.

Counsellors were requested to fill out a form indicating the reasons, where possible, for client non-participation in the study. Counsellors retained the professional discretion not to approach clients whom they felt to be too distressed. According to the information received from agencies, approximately one in five cases refused to participate, 16 per cent were considered ineligible and 10 per cent were not asked. These forms were filled out with variable degrees of accuracy. The most common reasons counsellors noted for non-participation were: clients were too distressed or hostile and refused or were not asked to participate; clients were concerned about confidentiality; there was insufficient time as clients came late and there were language or intellectual difficulties.

Counsellor and agency cooperation was an important factor in obtaining client participation in the study. Based on the (incomplete) information provided by the agencies, there was great variability in response rates across agencies which ranged from zero to around 75 per cent of new clients seen during the study period.

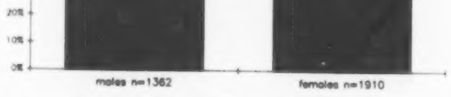
A total of 1325 clients completed the initial questionnaire and signed the consent form; and of these, 1302 people, coming from 937 separate relationships provided usable responses. Throughout the report, responses of men and women are considered separately. Since many individuals came with a partner to the first interview, two perspectives of the one relationship were often obtained. Analysing data by sex eliminated any bias that may have occurred because of this. The post-counselling survey was conducted eight months after the initial survey. All clients participating in the first phase of the study were surveyed by mail. A telephone follow-up survey was conducted to increase the response rate.

Response Rates

Of the 1302 usable responses, 60 per cent of respondents were female (777) and 40 per cent male (525). This is the same ratio of males to females that attend marriage counselling overall. Forty-seven per cent of the females at the first survey came to counselling with a partner (365) compared to 69 per cent (365) of the males. Thus men are significantly more likely than women to have come with their spouse or partner. According to the Attorney-General's Department, 3272 new clients attended marriage counselling during the survey period and AIFS estimates this represents 2262 cases. As data were collected on 1302 clients, this gives a response rate of 40 per cent.

Figure 1 shows the response rates for the pre-counselling survey. The response rates for males and females were similar, 39 per cent and 41 per cent respectively. However, the response rate for cases is estimated at 46 per cent. This discrepancy is due to the fact that often one client attends without their partner for the intake interview (when the survey was conducted) and the partner attends on subsequent visits, which would place them outside the sample but included in the Attorney-General's figures.

Figure 1: Response rate Time 1 survey



The Institute's sample for the pre-counselling survey was not significantly different from the client sampling frame on the following characteristics: country of birth; English-speaking versus non-English-speaking country of birth; education (tertiary or not); religion (for females); labour force status; whether employed full- or part-time (for working women); occupation (females); duration of marriage. However, there were significantly fewer Catholic men represented and fewer men in lower status occupations. There were also significant differences in response rates by State or Territory (Table 14).

Table 14: Response rates for each State, pre-counselling survey

State	Males %	Females %
NSW	42	43
Vic	35	44
Qld	29	30
SA	56	54
WA	48	48
Tas	23	28
NT	34	37
ACT	29	36
Total	39	41
(n)	(525)	(777)

Queensland, which has the highest rate of participation in marriage counselling, had a very low response rate in the study. Tasmania and ACT also had low response rates (although these States are small in population). Western Australia and South Australia had high response rates.

Response rates by State were not as variable in the post-counselling survey as they were in the pre-counselling survey, but again, response rates were higher for South Australia and Western Australia (Table 15). Again, variability in response rate by State is seen with South Australia and Western Australia being particularly high.

Table 15: Response rates for each State, post-counselling

State	Males %	Females %
NSW	27	42
Vic	36	48
Qld	29	42
SA	43	52
WA	41	50
Tas	*	*
NT	*	*
ACT	*	53
Total	33	46
(n)	(163)	(336)

The number of usable responses at the time of the post-counselling survey was 534 — that is, 41 per cent of the pre-counselling sample. Sixty-eight per cent (365) were female and 32 per cent (169) were male. The response rate for males in the second stage of the study was 32 per cent compared to 47 per cent for women — a significant difference (Figure 2). Again, it was found that males who had come initially with a partner were more likely to remain in the sample after counselling. However, according to the Attorney-General's statistics, men appear overall more likely to drop out of counselling after one interview. Other studies report this same sex bias (Wiederkehr *et al.* 1981; Hunt 1985).

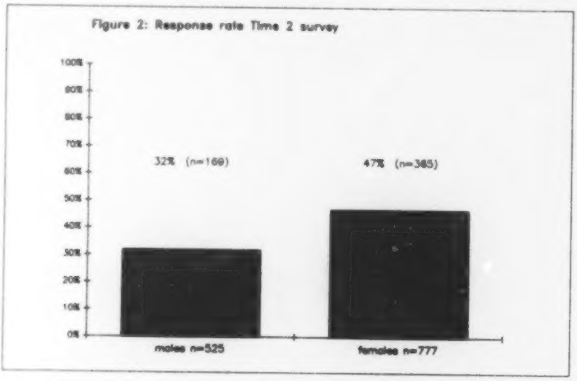


Figure 2: Response rate Time 2 survey

Attempts were made to contact 450 of the post-counselling non-respondents by telephone. Respondents were contacted over a period of five week nights between 5.30pm and 8.30pm. Respondents contacted and answering selected questionnaire items numbered 126 — a 26 per cent response rate. While there was a small refusal rate, problems occurred mainly because the call was not answered or the person had moved. Fifty-six per cent of the telephone respondents were female and 44 were male. Including the telephone respondents, a total response rate for the post-counselling survey of 51 per cent was achieved.

Higher response rates (50–70 per cent) have been reported for some other marriage counselling studies (Huppert 1975; Eckersley and Garrow 1976; Beck and Jones 1973; Burnett 1985); however, different screening processes were sometimes used to select the initial samples. Similar or lower response rates (20–40 per cent) were obtained in other studies (Hunt 1985; Wiederkehr *et al.* 1981; Cramb and Hills 1982).

7

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

In taking a census of new clients in a certain time period this study provides a detailed profile of who marriage counselling clients are in Australia. The following analysis is based on data collected in the pre-counselling questionnaire and data provided by the Attorney-General's Department Demographic and Face Sheets. As there are differential response rates to these questionnaires, the total numbers of respondents will vary:

Institute Questionnaire	n = 1302 (100 per cent);
Demographic Data	n = 1216 (93 per cent);
Face Sheet	n = 1005 (77 per cent).

The client profile below examines individual characteristics, relationships factors, counselling expectations and presenting problems. Since the ratio of males to females differs so greatly, it was decided to report on males and females separately and compare any significant differences between them. Table 16 describes the individual characteristics of respondents at the time counselling began.

Demographic Characteristics

Age Women tended to be significantly younger than men, but this is likely to be related to the difference in the age at marriage between men and women, with women marrying at an earlier age. Half of the respondents were 35 years and under; a third were between the ages of 36 and 45 years.

Place of birth Three-quarters of men and women were Australian-born and, in all, nine out of ten were from English-speaking backgrounds.

Education Women tended to be less well educated than men. The fact that a third of initial clients had a low education (Year 10 or less) indicates that marriage counselling is accessible to a broad cross-section of the population.

Table 16: Individual characteristics at the start of counselling

	Sex of Respondent			
	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
Age of respondent				
under 25	26	5	68	10
26–30	99	21	169	24
31–35	118	25	170	24
36–40	96	20	139	20
41–45	76	16	85	12
46–50	32	7	39	6
51+	28	6	31	4
Total	475	100	701	100
Education				
Year 10 or less	155	33	249	36
Leaving/HSC	135	29	266	38
Trade	79	17	61	9
Degree/diploma	102	22	124	18
Total	471	100	700	100
Place of birth				
Australia	371	77	556	78
New Zealand	6	1	12	2
United Kingdom	67	14	89	12
Europe	21	4	25	4
Asia	6	1	11	2
Middle East	3	1	2	0
Other	8	2	19	3
Total	482	100	714	100
Religion				
Catholic	89	21	181	30
Anglican, Protestant	171	40	252	41
Jewish	3	1	3	0
Muslim	3	1	3	0
No religion	125	29	130	21
Other	33	8	45	7
Total	424	100	613	100
Employment status				
Full-time	402	84	217	31
Part-time	10	2	151	22
Casual	8	2	54	8
Unemployed	32	7	31	4
Student	4	1	24	3
Home duties	3	1	204	29
Other	20	4	11	2
Total	479	100	692	100
Occupation				
Student	4	1	13	2
Clerk, sales	62	13	173	26
Managerial, admin	61	13	42	6

Home duties	1	0	135	100
Transport, comm, serv	53	11	50	8
Trades, labourer	131	28	46	7
Professional	123	26	161	25
Other	35	7	37	6
Total	470	100	657	100
Major income source				
Salary, wages	367	77	356	60
Self employed	57	12	30	5
Partners income	6	1	100	17
Unemployment benefit	18	4	17	3
Workers compensation	1	0	1	0
Student allowance	5	1	21	4
Supporting parent	6	1	28	5
Retired/age pension	7	1	6	1
Invalid pension	5	1	6	1
Sickness benefit	4	1	20	3
Other	3	1	10	2
Total	479	100	595	100
Income				
Less than 8000	39	9	153	33
8001–12000	26	6	68	14
12001–15000	23	5	43	9
15001–18000	49	12	50	11
18001–22000	71	17	59	13
22001–26000	79	19	49	10
26001–30000	51	12	19	4
30001–50000	75	18	23	5
Over 50000	10	2	6	1
Total	423	100	470	100

Religion Where data on religion (an optional question) is available, it was found that one in five males were Catholic compared to 30 per cent of women. Four out of ten males and females came from Protestant backgrounds. Twenty-nine per cent of men and 21 per cent of women stated they had no religion.

Employment status The majority of men (84 per cent) were in full-time employment compared to 31 per cent of women, however almost one-third of women were doing part-time or casual work. Only 29 per cent of women identified themselves as housewives. Seven per cent of men and four per cent of women stated they were unemployed.

Occupational status Women in employment tended to be in clerical and sales occuptions or professional occuptions, whereas men tended to be professional or in trade.

Major income sources Seventy-seven per cent of males and 60 per cent of females worked for salaries and wages: 12 per cent of men and 5 per cent of women were self-employed. Seventeen per cent of women had their partner's income as their main source of income. Government assistance was the main source of income for 10 per cent of men compared to 18 per cent of women. Five per cent of women were on Supporting Parents Benefits, four per cent were receiving a student allowance, three per cent were on sickness beneft and 3 per cent were unemployed.

Income The median income for males was $18 000–$22 000 and for females $12 000–$15 000. Since household income was not requested on the Attorney-General's form, an accurate measure of total income was not obtained.

Relationship Table 17 sets out the characteristics of respondent's relationships when they first attended counselling.

Table 17: Relationship characteristics at the start of counselling

	Sex of Respondent			
	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
Relationship status				
Married, together	307	59	496	64
Married, separated	132	25	165	21
De facto	34	7	59	8
De facto, separated	26	5	28	4
Individual	23	4	24	3
Total	522	100	772	100
Duration of relationship				
3 years and under	93	22	118	19
4–9 years	119	28	177	28
10–15	83	20	129	20
16–20	65	15	110	17
20+	61	14	102	16
Total	421	100	636	100
Children				
Children	283	71	480	76
No children	118	29	155	24
Total	401	100	635	100

Relationship status The majority of clients (59 per cent of men and 64 per cent of women) were in intact marriages when they first came to counselling. Twenty-five per cent of men were married but separated from their wives compared to 21 per cent of women who were separated from their husbands. Twelve per cent of both men and women came about a de facto relationship; 7 per cent of these men were currently living with their partner and 5 per cent had separated compared to 8 per cent and 4 per cent of the women respectively. Four per cent of men and 3 per cent of women came to counselling about a relationship where the couple were not living together.

Children Approximately 71 per cent of men and 76 per cent of women had children living with them.

Duration of relationship Around one-fifth of men and women had been in relationships for three years and under. Just over a quarter of men and women had been together four to nine years. One-fifth had been together ten to fifteen years. Fifteen per cent of men and 17 per cent of women had been in their relationship for 16 to 20 years, and 14 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women had been together over 20 years. During 1987, the median duration of marriages that ended in divorce was 10.2 years.

Personal Characteristics

Whilst the main focus of counselling is the relationship, when clients come to counselling they come both as individuals and as partners in a relationship. Therefore in addition to collecting information about the client's demographic characteristics, the study describes some of the client's personal characteristics.

Information on individual clients' wellbeing and self-esteem were measured. Heady and Wearing (1981) and Weston (1986) have consistently found that Australians report very high levels of satisfaction with their closest personal relationships, their children, marriage, and friends. They have found moderately high levels of satisfaction in areas relating to work, income and standard of living. Also, satisfaction levels are moderate in the more introspective self-related areas such as self-fulfillment, and self-esteem and sex life. The area where they found relatively low satisfaction levels are those relating to spending time, physical fitness and political values. (According to Heady and Wearing (1981) high satisfaction is a score of 7.1–9.0, moderately high satisfaction is 6.0–7.0, and low satisfaction is 1–5.9). Broadly, a comparison with our findings on life satisfaction at the start of counselling (Table 18) indicates that apart from moderately high satisfaction with their relationship to their children, and issues such as job satisfaction, health and acceptance by others, marriage counselling clients are significantly lower in most areas, especially so in items relating to their sex life, their marriage and personal life when they present at marriage counselling services.

Examining individual items relating to life satisfaction, there are significant differences between men and women on items regarding economic matters such as income and standard of living, depending on their relationship status with those who are already separated being least satisfied. Health is another area where there are significant differences, with the separated, particularly women, reporting least satisfaction. When it comes to issues such as personal and emotional life, social life, goals and purposes in life, acceptance by others, and how interesting life is, the separated are significantly less satisfied with their lives than those in relationships. Wives in intact relationships, however, are less satisfied than their mates.

Women have significantly lower levels of satisfaction than men on income, health, personal and emotional life, and items that relate generally

Table 18: Wellbeing by sex and relationship status at the start of counselling (mean differences)

Range 1–9: High = 7.1–9.0 Moderate = 6.0–7.0 Low = 1–5.9

	Male			Female		
	Together %	Apart %	Total %	Together %	Apart %	Total %
Income	5.7	5.2	5.63	5.5	4.9	5.37
Standard of living	6.4	6.0	6.33	6.4	5.7	6.23
Job (where applicable)	6.0	5.7	5.97	6.0	6.3	6.16
Independence	5.5	5.5	5.59	5.0	5.2	5.13
Health	6.6	6.3	6.55	6.1	5.9	6.09
Personal and emotional life	4.8	3.9	4.56	3.7	3.8	3.81
Social life and friendships	5.7	5.0	5.56	5.0	5.5	5.60
Acceptance by others	6.4	5.9	6.26	6.3	6.2	6.29
How interesting life is	5.8	5.3	5.72	3.4	5.3	5.29
How you would like to be	5.7	5.5	5.69	5.3	5.5	5.42
Purpose in life	5.6	5.2	5.52	5.2	5.0	5.18
Way you handle problems	5.4	5.0	5.53	5.0	5.0	5.01
Accomplishing in life	5.8	5.3	5.65	5.2	5.2	5.24
Relationship with children	7.0	6.9	6.98	7.1	6.7	7.02
Sex life	4.9	4.2	4.79	4.4	4.5	4.51
Marriage relationship	4.8	3.4	4.46	4.1	3.3	4.00
(n)	330	155	485	536	188	724

to self esteem. They are also significantly less satisfied with their relationships with their children, their sex life and marriage.

Weston (1986) found that women prior to divorce generally had a lower sense of wellbeing than men. Research on martial satisfaction has consistently found lower satisfaction for wives than husbands (Brannen and Collard 1982; Bernard 1972). Also the perceived quality of marriage effects the wellbeing of wives more than husbands (Thompson and Walker 1989). Weston (1986) suggests that the lower morale of wives may lead them to see other areas of their lives more negatively.

Wellbeing and Self-esteem Measures

Several scales were developed from these wellbeing items which provide a measure of general wellbeing and a self-esteem scale (as discussed previously). As Table 19 shows, there were significant differences between men and women on both these scales. Women had significantly lower sense of wellbeing and self-esteem than men when they first came to counselling. People living together when they came to counselling tended to have a higher sense of wellbeing, particularly males (F=9.15; p=.002). It should be noted though, that the means of all groups fall in the moderately low satisfaction category.

Table 19: Self-esteem and wellbeing scales — mean difference by sex and relationship status, pre-counselling

Standard of living	$\bar{X}$	STD	Cases
Self-esteem (5-item scale)			
Range 5–45: High = 36–45	Moderate = 30–35		Low = 5–29
Apart	26.3	7.3	328
male	26.5	7.2	148
female	26.1	7.4	177
Together	27.1	6.4	813
male	28.6	6.0	312
female	26.1	6.5	501
Wellbeing (12-item scale)			
Range 12–108: High = 85–108	Moderate = 72–84		Low = 0–71
Apart	*64*	*14.7*	*294*
male	65	14.6	139
female	63	14.8	155
Together	67	12.6	722
male	70	11.3	288
female	65	13.3	434

Relationship Characteristics

Emotional status of the relationship Since the literature suggests that the emotional state of the marriage at the time of counselling is a predictor of outcome (Beach and Broderick 1983), in addition to looking at the actual relationship status, measures of satisfaction with the relationship, level of commitment to the relationship, how optimistic the respondent was about the relationship continuing or not and some idea of what the costs would be to the individual if the relationship broke down were obtained.

Satisfaction with Relationship

Among the wellbeing items discussed previously, a measure of marital and relationship satisfaction was included. It found that satisfaction with their marriage relationship and sex life is low in all groups and not significantly lower for any particular group, although males in intact relationships appear more satisfied than all females and separated males.

Commitment to the Relationship

Partners in a relationship may have different levels of commitment to the relationship; and this may affect motivation to seek counselling as well as the result of counselling. Taking the individual respondent's view of commitment and likelihood of separation or divorce in isolation from the perception of his or her partner's view of these issues is in some ways distorting. Therefore it was decided to look at the issue of commitment from the viewpoint of the couple (Table 20). In other words, does the respondent feel both partners are committed to the relationship, or that he or she only is committed, or his or her partner only, or that neither have a commitment to the relationship?

Table 20: Perceived commitment to the relationship

	Male	Female
Both committed	49%	51%
I am committed	29%	16%
Partner is committed	12%	18%
Neither is committed	10%	16%

Here we see that there are significant differences between men and women on how they perceive the level of commitment in their relationship. Women report being less committed than men, and are more likely to report that neither is committed in the relationship.

Commitment levels alone may not be an accurate predictor of counselling and relationship outcomes so a measure was developed that combined level of commitment with the level of optimism or pessimism about the relationship surviving.

Table 21: Commitment/Optimism levels

	Male			Female		
	Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total
Committed/low separation chance	44	21	40	39	11	35
Committed/high separation chance	36	41	38	32	28	30
Not committed	20	39	22	29	62	35
(n)	341	158	489	555	193	648

As Table 21 shows, the level of commitment and optimism or pessimism about the likely survival of the relationship varies little for men and women still in their relationship. Forty-four per cent of men and 39 per cent of women are committed and are optimistic about the future of the relationship compared to only 21 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women who were separated. The separated men are more likely than separated women to be committed to their relationship but pessimistic about its future (41 per cent compared to 28 per cent of separated women). Two-thirds of separated women came to counselling not committed to their relationship.

When exploring the dimension of commitment, it is necessary to consider the several aspects of commitment. For some commitment may mean an allegiance to the institution of marriage and the sacredness of the marital bond which may remain separate from any evaluation of the satisfaction within the relationship or a wish to improve the relationship. For others, commitment may mean a desire to work on improving the relationship, but have little connection to religious or moral beliefs about the permanence of marriage. Another aspect of commitment may be associated with the wish not to disrupt the lives of children, again not always related to levels of affect, intimacy or satisfaction with the relationship (Morgan and Scanzoni 1987; Scanzoni, Polonko, Tachman and Thompson 1989).

Perceptions of Consequences of Breakdown

Respondents were asked about the consequences if the relationship did not survive, that is, whether life would be better or worse if the relationship ended. A scale combining items concerning standard of living, social life, sex life, career opportunities and whether these aspects of life would be better or worse if the relationship were to end was developed.

Consequences scale	*Mean*	*SD*	*n*
Males	*12.76*	*2.8*	*460*
Females	*12.98*	*2.6*	*649*
Range = 4–16	*t-test not significant*		

There were no significant differences between men and women on this scale.

In exchange theory terms (Levinger 1976; Udry 1981), there are costs and benefits to all decisions made about relationships. Although a relationship may be unsatisfactory in many ways, if there are considerable costs or barriers to leaving it, a belief that life would be worse, the chances of remaining in the relationship increase. On the other hand, if one is optimistic about life without the relationship, then one is more likely to leave. Udry (1981) observes that individuals take an 'inventory' of the advantages and disadvantages of the relationship. Restraints, attractions or alternatives may be psychological or practical in origin.

Table 22 shows clients' perceptions of their options if they were to separate. Sixty-three per cent of women, compared to 44 per cent of men, believed their standard of living would be worse – a significant difference.

Concerning social life there is little difference between men and women: about one-third feel their social life would be better outside the relationship, just over one-third feel it would not make much difference, and the

Table 22: Consequences if relationship breaks down for those in intact relationships at the start of counselling

Consequence	Males %	Females %
Standard of living		
Better	14	7
Same	38	29
Worse	48	63
Social life		
Better	33	37
Same	38	37
Worse	29	26
Career opportunities		
Better	16	23
Same	70	61
Worse	14	16
Sex life		
Better	26	21
Same	23	22
Worse	51	58
Being a parent		
Better	9	22
Same	24	35
Worse	67	43

remaining slightly less than one-third feel that things would be worse. The majority of men and women believe that staying or leaving the relationship will not affect their career prospects. When it comes to sex life, more than one-half of men and women believed they would be worse off without the spouse/partner. Men are far more pessimistic about their life as a parent without the relationship, reflecting realistically that in most cases it is the mother who gets custody of the children.

Degree of Consensus and Conflict in the Relationship

Items adapted from the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale were used to examine the degree of consensus or disagreement in particular areas in the relationship. A marital consensus scale was created using items from the Spanier affection and consensus scales. This is a ten-item scale with an alpha reliability of .832.

Males had a significantly higher level of relationship consensus than females (male mean 29.51 compared to female mean 28.10; SD males 7.03 compared to female SD 7.5; t value 2.92; p.004).

As Table 23 shows, if a two-way analysis of variance is conducted

Table 23: Marital consensus by sex and relationship status at the start of counselling: mean differences

Marital consensus (10-item scale)	Range (0–50):		n
Apart	26.7	7.7	281
male	28.0	7.6	182
female	25.6	7.6	149
Together	29.3	7.1	854
male	30.0	6.7	326
female	28.8	7.3	528

looking at marital consensus by relationship status controlling for sex (F 19.9; p<.000), those who have separated have the lowest marital consensus, with separated women reporting the most disagreement or least agreement in their relationship.

The areas of least consensus, as shown in Table 24, are similar for males and females – handling conflict, showing affection, sexual relationship, individual time, time spent together, leisure and recreation issues. However, women more than men also feel there is a conflict over household tasks and the aims and goals of the relationship.

Table 24: Marital consensus by sex

Always agree	Almost always agree	Occasionally disagree	Frequently disagree	Almost always disagree	Always disagree
5	4	3	2	1	0

	Male	Female
Handling finances	3.2	3.1
Leisure time	2.8	2.6
Friends	3.1	3.1
Aims and goals	3.0	2.9
Time spent together	2.8	2.6
Dealing with in-laws	3.1	3.0
Major decisions	3.3	3.1
Household tasks	3.1	2.8
Showing affection	2.6	2.5
Work matters	3.1	3.0
Sex	2.7	2.6
Individual time	2.7	2.7
Drinking, drugs	3.3	3.0
Handling conflicts	2.5	2.2
Raising children	3.2	2.9

Although couples may disagree over some issues, these may not necessarily be important to the relationship, so in addition clients were asked to rank the three most important areas of disagreement in the relationship (Figure 3 and 4). These figures show that the most important areas for men and women whether separated or together are about showing affection, their sexual relationship and the amount of time the couple spend together — all issues related to the affective quality of the relationship.

Figure 3: Important areas of disagreement — Males

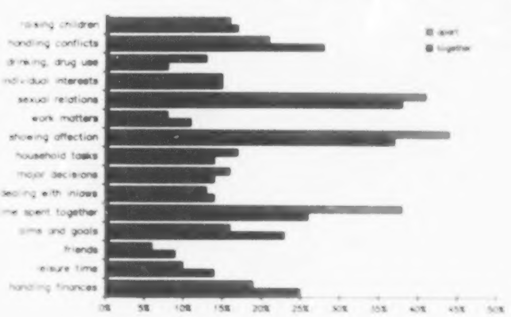
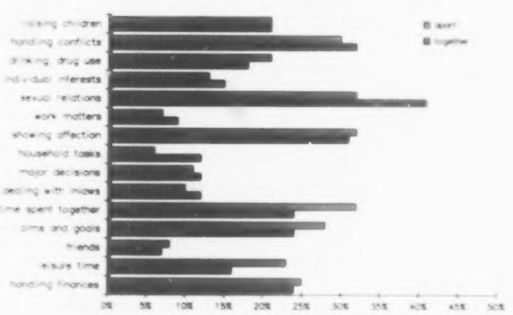


Figure 4: Important areas of disagreement — Females



If, however, important areas of disagreement are looked at from the couple perspective, where we have both partners in a relationship (Table 25), it can be seen that partners seldom agree on the important areas of disagreement within their relationship. This highlights the different agendas each partner may bring to counselling and the often disparate perceptions of men and women concerning their relationship. The highest levels of consensus about the most important areas of disagreement were in the following areas: their sexual relationship, showing affection and the handling of family finances.

Table 25: Important areas of disagreement within couples (n=352 couples)

Area	Both agree important %	Males only %	Females only %	Neither agree is important %
Handling finances	13	11	11	64
Leisure time	4	9	13	74
Friends	3	6	5	84
Aims and goals	11	13	15	59
Time spent together	12	17	12	58
Dealing with in-laws	6	7	6	80
Major decisions	4	9	9	77
Household tasks	5	10	7	78
Showing affection	18	18	10	49
Work matters	3	7	5	83
Sex	25	12	14	47
Individual time	4	10	11	74
Drinking, drugs	6	4	10	79
Handling conflicts	12	14	16	57
Raising children	7	10	9	72

8

WHY CLIENTS CAME TO COUNSELLING

Problems

At the time clients came to counselling they were asked by the counsellor what the main issue was that brought them to counselling. Many of the client problems or issues identified by the counsellors centred around the client's expectations for their relationship and the focus of counselling in terms of separation or improvement of the relationship. More specific issues illustrate or expand upon the possible underlying reasons influencing whether the focus of counselling and expectations are about ending or maintaining the relationship.

Table 26 shows that more women (30%) than men (18%) who were already separated raised separation issues whereas separated men (26%) more than women (19%) were more concerned about reconciliation. Women in intact relationships were also more concerned with separation (15%) than men (9%) in the same situation. Again, women appear to come to counselling more inclined toward separation and less inclined toward reconciliation than men.

For those still in their relationship, communication was seen as a major issue (29% of men and 31% of women). Comments by respondents suggest that a problem identified as communication may often be a global way of indicating a more general erosion of the emotional and affective aspects of the relationship. For example,

'There was a lack of communication, a lack of sexual activity, and a lack of consideration from my partner.' (Separated man)

Even for those who were already separated, a lack of communication was linked with other dimensions of the marriage breakdown.

'There was a lack of communication, a feeling of helplessness in watching our marriage collapse, feelings of hurt and rejection.' (Woman in an intact relationship)

Table 26: Main issue presented at first counselling session

Issue	Male Together %	Male Apart %	Female Together %	Female Apart %	Total %
Separation	9	18	15	30	16
Reconciliation	4	26	2	19	9
Legal requirement	1	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.8
Access and custody	0.4	0.3	0.5	2	1
Communication	29	13	31	11	24
Loss of interest	4	3	7	3	5
Sexual	7	2	5	3	5
Affair	7	2	5	3	5
Role conflict	7	7	3	5	7
Arguments	14	3	10	4	9
Violence	2	7	3	7	4
In-law problems	2	2	1	—	1
Finance	1	—	0.5	—	0.4
Parenting	5	4	5	3	4
Personal problems	3	2	4	5	4
Health	1	—	1	—	0.6
Remarriage	0.4	4	0.5	3	2
Other	2	3	1	3	3
n =	249	123	408	154	979

A range of issues, each identified as problems by a small proportion of clients, could be interpreted as actual or potential threats to the stability of the relationship, for example, loss of interest in the relationship, an affair, sexual problems, arguments, violence, and role conflicts. The following comments illustrate these problem areas.

'Our sex life mainly, or lack of interest.' (Female in an intact relationship)

'My wife wants to be a businesswoman and is not interested in family life.' (Male in an intact relationship)

As discussed previously, sexual issues were considered an important area of disagreement for approximately 40 per cent of men and women living together and 41 per cent of men and 32 per cent of women who were separated. Showing affection was so for 37 per cent of men and 31 per cent of women in intact relationships and 44 per cent of men and 32 per cent of separated women.

Affairs and sexual difficulties have been interpreted as a symbol, a reflection of other problematic areas in the relationship, especially those related to acceptance and rejection of the self as an individual and as a partner (Hartin 1988; Dicks 1967). These comments confirm this assumption.

'Unhappy in myself and in our relationship especially in areas of sex.' (Woman in intact relationship)

'Build up of conflicts not vented culminating in affairs.' (Woman in intact relationship)

Incidents of violence were mentioned by seven per cent of separated men and women and two per cent of men and women living together at the time of counselling.

'My partner's drinking, belting me up.' (Separated woman)

Another indicator of the extent of violence in relationships can be inferred from responses to a question which asked respondents how they might deal with serious disagreements. Approximately one-quarter of men and women stated that they would sometimes hit or throw things at each other and another nine per cent of men and five per cent of women said this occurred often. When only the responses of couples were considered, 23 per cent of both partners said they both sometimes hit or threw things at each other.

Money, as a specific problem, was surprisingly absent from the list of issues, suggesting, perhaps, the expectation on the part of both clients and counsellors that counselling is about the interpersonal aspects of relationships. As discussed previously, however, how family finances were handled was an important area of disagreement for nearly one-quarter of men and women in intact relationships and for 19 per cent of separated men and 25 per cent separated women.

Scanzoni (1982) has observed how the control of money in a marriage reveals conflicting assumptions about power and authority in the issues related to marital tensions. Given the format of the question, we have no way of determining whether this response means disagreement over who controls the distribution of family finances, if it refers to irresponsibility in handling money on the part of one partner, or whether lack of money was the underlying problem.

At the time of the study, the majority of men and women in intact relationships were moderately satisfied with their standard of living whereas separated women, not unexpectedly, indicated low satisfaction in this area.

Although conflicts over the roles of men and women as partners and parents were not represented as issues or problems in significant proportions, related issues such as the amount of time spent together, raising children, and aims and goals were important areas of disagreement for men and women both separated and together as shown in Figures 3 and 4 in the previous section.

Comments by respondents provide some sense of the emotional environment of the relationships.

'Injustice, he had time with his mates, but never took me out.' (Woman in intact relationship)

'Lack of understanding and support in raising of children, selfishness and not prepared to face the responsibilities of being a parent.' (Separated woman)

Timms and Blampied (1985) describe counselling as the social space in which a client's version of marital problems can be confirmed, tested, revealed, qualified, and modified. The problems stated initially may be those that are easier to disclose or to recognise, such as irritating habits of a spouse, arguments, sexual difficulties, or fighting with in-laws. During counselling, less conscious but influential or intrinsic concerns about power and control, intimacy, dependency and independence, and unresolved issues from each partner's relationships with their own families or origin may emerge (Pincus 1960; Hartin 1988).

These comments reflect such an interpretation:

'*Through the counselling I was able to understand the deeper cause of our problems and the issues initially in mind were just distractions from these problems.*' (Female, separated)

'*It held a mirror to the relationship and exposed the effect that other relationships like with my mother have on our marriage.*' (Male, in intact relationship)

'*It revealed a great many previously unknown feelings and thoughts on both sides.*' (Female, in intact relationship)

These comments, given retrospectively, also reflect the general psychological counselling paradigm discussed above. The aims of counselling have been stated as to help people recognise the wider issues underlying their problems, to encourage other ways of interpreting situations and to provide alternative methods to resolving issues.

9

EXPECTATIONS OF COUNSELLING

How clients judge the counselling experience will obviously be affected by their expectations about what counselling can achieve, by what they want to happen to, or do about, their relationship and by the problems they hope will be resolved. Beliefs about marital roles, personal values or the level of commitment to working on the relationship or terminating it will influence expectations.

Expectations can be examined in terms of the aims of counselling according to the *Family Law Act* 'in relation to reconciliation of the parties to a marriage' and 'in relation to the dissolution of a marriage or to the adjusting to the dissolution of a marriage'. Counselling may also be judged against the respondent's personal growth goals and acquisition of skills regardless of the final status of the relationship.

In this section, expectations will be examined firstly in relation to the counselling focus regarding the outcome of the relationship This information was collected by the counsellors at the first interview. Secondly, clients were asked what they expected to gain from counselling for themselves as individuals and for their relationship.

Expectations About the Outcome for the Relationship

We will begin with expectations related to the aims of counselling according to the *Family Law Act*.

Staying together

Hunt (1985) refers to clients coming to a marriage counselling agency to 'mend not end' marriages. For the majority of respondents remaining married or improving the relationship was the main focus of counselling. Table 27 sets out the overall expectations in relation to the status of the respondents' relationship at the time counselling commenced, based on the counsellor's assessment of the main focus of counselling. For those who were in intact relationships at the beginning of counselling 89 per cent of men and 81 per cent of women wanted to remain in their relationship compared to 29 per cent of separated men and 27 per cent of separated women. Where we have both perspectives on a relationship, it was found that in 66 per cent of couples both partners wanted to remain together.

Table 27: Main counselling focus by relationship status

	Together %	Male Apart %	Total %	Together %	Female Apart %	Total %	Overall total
Improve & maintain relationship	89	29	70	81	27	68	69
To separate	8	17	12	17	40	22	18
To reconcile	3	53	18	2	33	10	13
n=	236	109	345	394	136	530	875

Decisions About Separation and Divorce

Clients also come to counselling to clarify or reinforce decisions about separation. Eight per cent of men and 17 per cent of women still with their partner intended separating. Separated women (40 per cent) were more inclined to want to remain separated than men who had already separated when they commenced counselling (17 per cent). This trend is also reflected in those who seek to reconcile with their partner, 53 per cent of separated men hoped for reconciliation compared to 33 per cent of women. Where we have 'his and her' data, in five per cent of cases both partners came with the intention of separating, and in eight per cent of couples both wished to be reconciled with their spouse. These comments illustrate client expectations about decisions to separate.

'*We went to find out whether we should divorce or attempt reconciliation.*' (Female, subsequently separated)

'*We were going to separate and went to help us get through the separation more easily.*' (Female, subsequently separated)

'*Whether to separate from my spouse, would it be worthwhile in the long term and if so how to go about it.*' (Female in intact relationship)

Previous research has confirmed that women more often initiate separation in response to marital dissatisfaction (McDonald 1986; Burns 1980). At the time counselling commenced, 26 per cent of men compared to 52 per cent of women indicated they had discussed the idea of separation with their partner. In contrast, only 18 per cent of women said their partner had brought up the subject of separation compared to 47 per cent of men who attributed the idea of separation to their partner.

Coping with Separation

At the time respondents came to counselling, 22 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men were already separated. Some of these respondents came to counselling for assistance with coping with a separation or divorce that had already taken place.

'*Accepting the separation. Understanding the reason for separation and coping with it.*' (Female, separated)

'*Understanding and coping with the breakdown of marriage and subsequent separation.*' (Male, separated)

Several respondents stated they had sought counselling to give legitimacy to their decision to leave or to provide support for a spouse to relieve their guilt and relinquish some of the responsibility.

'*I had decided I wanted to finish my marriage for good and wanted counselling to help my spouse see why I wanted to leave.*' (Female, separated)

'*I was having difficulty getting my husband to understand and accept the separation.*' (Female, separated)

Comments were made mainly by women concerned about the effect of separation on their partners. Chadwick (1989), Jordan (1988) and Clulow and Vincent(1987) conclude from their studies of divorce that men appear to have more difficulty than women in coping with the emotional consequences of divorce. Since women more than men had raised the idea of separation, it is possible that they had acknowledged the difficulties earlier on and were more psychologically prepared for the separation.

Personal and Relationship Expectations

Generally research into marriage counselling has found that client expectations cluster around insight and understanding of one's self, partner and the relationship, improving communication, problem solving and conflict resolution skills, advice with decisions about separation and other problems and having a neutral, supportive and professional person to discuss things with (Hunt 1985; Timms and Blampied 1985; Cramb and Hills 1982; and Brannen and Collard 1982).

For this reason items associated with these areas of expectation are included in this survey. Rather than discuss each item as set out in Table 28, we have sought to see whether there are underlying dimensions to client expectations.

Table 28: Expectation of counselling by relationship status pre-counselling

	Male			Female		
	Apart	Together	Total	Apart	Together	Total
Expectation	%	%	%	%	%	%
Individual counselling						
Sort out thoughts and feelings	56	47	50	70	67	68
Change myself	17	21	20	20	19	19
Get support, understanding	25	22	23	40	36	37
Get advice on what to do	39	37	37	32	34	34
Assistance with decisions	34	20	24	42	37	38
Develop better personal relations	50	53	52	45	54	52
Solve personal problems	34	33	33	42	41	41
Techniques to handle things more effectively	31	46	41	53	57	56
Confide in someone	28	25	26	50	43	45
Relationship counselling						
Settling differences	32	40	37	38	36	37
Improve communication	48	56	53	51	65	61
Handling conflicts	29	38	35	40	50	47
What went wrong in relationship	49	32	38	54	33	39
Sort out relationship	30	44	39	33	48	44
Understand partner better	32	43	40	36	42	41
Change partner	5	6	5	6	5	5
What partner has done wrong	15	14	15	18	22	21
What I have done wrong	36	29	31	32	29	29
Help partner understand me better	30	35	34	38	45	43
Which relationship I want to be in	10	9	9	19	9	12

The items included in Table 28 were factor analysed, and yielded three scales, which are set out below.

The first scale could be described as acquiring skills. Whilst we had asked clients separately about expectations for themselves and their relationship, the factor solution shows that clients hoped to acquire a range of skills to enhance both their personal life and their relationship. The second scale is concerned with gaining insight into the relationship with a view to improving it, and the third is related to gaining personal support and advice.

Scale 1: Acquire Skills
(Alpha Reliability .773 5-item scale)

Items	*Factor loading*
To learn techniques to handle things more effectively	.7123
To improve the way we communicate	.6495
To learn how to handle conflict	.6478
To get assistance in developing better personal relationships	.6235
To understand my partner better	.5803

Scale 2: Gain insight into relationship
(Alpha Reliability .7392 6-item scale)

Items	*Factor loading*
To understand what I have done wrong	.6171
To understand what went wrong with the relationship	.6151
To make my partner see what he/she has done wrong	.5760
To help my partner understand me better	.5729
To sort out what is going on in our relationship .5538	
To get assistance with settling our differences	.5026

Scale 3: Get support
(Alpha Reliability .6295 5-item scale)

Items	*Factor loading*
To get assistance in making decisions about my life	.6794
To sort out my thoughts and feelings	.6536
To be able to confide in someone outside my situation	.5557
To get support and understanding	.4610
To solve some personal problems	.3962

Acquiring Skills

Apart from the general expectation of sorting out thoughts and feelings, the most frequently mentioned expectations for men and women were concerned with acquiring skills: improving communication and developing better personal strategies (see Figure 5 and Table 28). They wanted to be able to cope more effectively in general and (for women more than men) to learn how to handle conflict in particular. Clients wanted to acquire skills to assist them in better understanding their partner and gaining insights into their relationship and current situation.

Women are significantly more likely to want to acquire skills for themselves and to handle their relationship problems than men, as Figure 5 illustrates. Relationship status at the start of counselling does significantly influence whether clients want to acquire skills. Separated males are least likely to expect to acquire skills when they come to counselling.

Those who are committed and optimistic about their relationship, whether male or female are more likely to expect to acquire skills from

Figure 5: Expectations of counselling by relationship status (Time 1) – standardised means

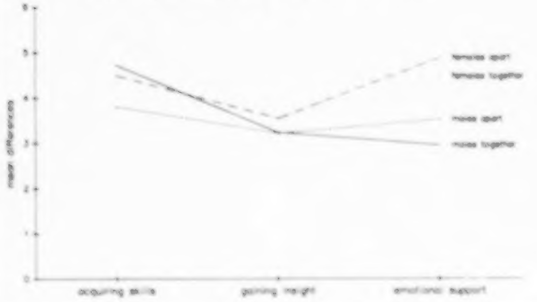
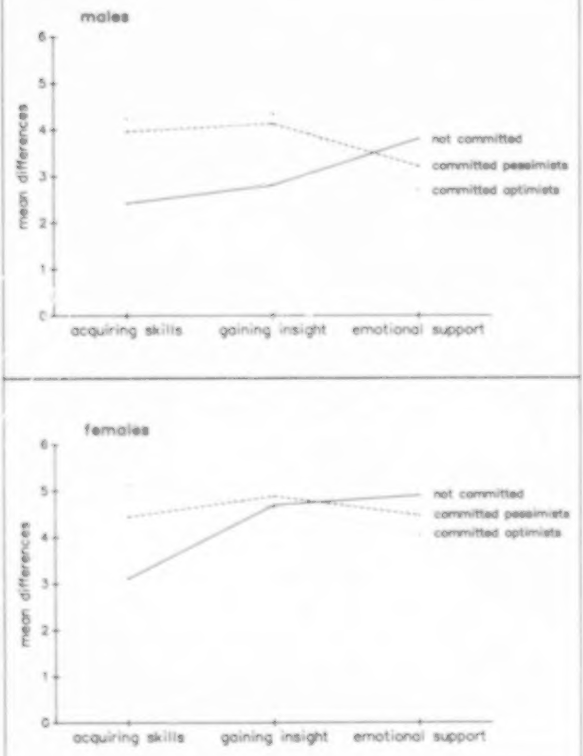


Figure 6: Expectations of counselling (Time 1) – by relationship type and sex



counselling (Figure 6), those who are committed though pessimistic about the possible outcome for their relationship are also interested in skill-building. The uncommitted are less likely to be seeking personal or relationships skills.

Gaining Insight

Making sense of what was happening in the relationship, a wish to understand what was going wrong or had gone wrong was another dimension of expectations (Table 28). Timms and Blampied (1985) talk about the need for clients to 'place their particular experience on the general map of contemporary marriage' (p.47). Women are significantly more likely to want to gain insight into their relationship than men, and there is no difference in whether they are living with their partner or separated (Figure 5).

'I wanted to help uncover the reasons for our problems.' (Woman in intact relationship)

'I wanted to know why my partner left and what was bothering her.' (Separated male)

In some instances understanding took the form of wanting the partner to understand them better. More women (43 per cent) than men (34 per cent) felt this way. Conversely, 40 per cent of men and women expected counselling to enable them to understand their partner better, and 30 per cent of men and women wanted to better understand their own contributions to the situation.

'Getting my partner to understand my problems with our relationship, to see and understand why I resented my partner'. (Separated female)

'Getting my husband to understand that the quality of home life for the whole family was extremely important'. (Female in an intact relationship)

'Why the breakup happened, why I was to blame'. (Separated male)

Emotional Support

Expectations had a personal as well as a relationship focus. Clients wanted to sort out their thoughts and feelings, get support and understanding, have someone neutral to confide in, solve personal problems and get assistance making decisions about their lives. Although women sought emotional support significantly more than men, separated men also hoped to gain support from counselling (Figure 5).

Expectations of counselling did not differ significantly for those with different education levels, age or whether or not there were children.

In summary, the reasons for seeking counselling and the expectations of counselling relate not just to the status of the relationship but also encompass improving and understanding the relationship and obtaining personal assistance and support.

Our respondents' emphasis on the absence of the affectional components of their relationships — showing affection, sexual compatibility, time together and communication — as problems and areas of disagreement reinforces the centrality of emotional satisfaction and personal fulfillment as the cornerstone of contemporary marriage. This compares with a focus on the performance of traditional roles noted in previous decades (Craddock 1980).

10

PATHWAYS TO MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

As Brannen and Collard (1982) point out, before seeking help for marital and relationship problems at a marriage counselling agency, it is necessary for people to recognize that something is wrong with the relationship, to interpret what is wrong as a marital problem, and to make a decision to disclose their problems to an outside source, in this case a marriage counsellor. However, as Jessie Bernard (1972) has observed, in every marriage there are two relationships, his and hers, with different levels of satisfaction and definitions of problems. Women, according to much of the literature, tend to seek help more than men and are more likely to initiate counselling.

To properly understand the motivations and pathways of counselling requires a case study approach. Therefore, this study can only suggest explanations of this process based on the mailed questionnaire responses linked to the results of other relevant studies of marriage counselling reported in the literature.

The pathways to counselling taken by the study clients are described in the next section. Assistance prior to counselling is looked at in terms of reliance on self or partner, informal assistance from friends or family and formal assistance from professional resources.

Problem-solving Before Counselling

Respondents were asked whether there was anything they had tried to do about their relationship problems before coming to the counselling agency. As Table 29 shows, the majority of clients had either tried to sort out their relationship problems themselves (men 67 per cent, women 71 per cent) or attempted to resolve things within the relationship (71 per cent). Those who were already separated were significantly less likely to have discussed things with their partner (men 59 per cent, women 64 per cent).

Table 29: Help prior to counselling by relationship status by sex

	Male			Female		
	Apart %	Together %	Total %	Apart %	Together %	Total %
Within relationship						
Solve them myself	68	67	67	72	71	71
Talked with partner	59	76	71	64	73	71
Informal						
Talked things out with family	30	15	20	39	34	34
Talked with friends	35	25	28	54	44	46
Formal						
Doctor	15	15	15	27	24	25
Religious help	12	5	7	13	10	11
Legal advice	11	2	5	17	7	9
Social worker	8	3	5	16	8	10
Psychiatrist	7	4	5	8	7	7
Psychologist	4	5	5	12	6	8

Since respondents were able to give multiple responses to the referral questions it is difficult to obtain a clear perspective of actual numbers of clients who used or did not use outside help of any kind. Table 30 distinguishes between respondents who relied only on help within the relationship and those who turned to outside assistance.

Table 30: Help prior to counselling, 'other things tried', by relationship status

	Males			Females		
	Apart %	Together %	Total %	Apart %	Together %	Total %
Within couple	41	55	51	16	25	23
Used some informal help/within couple	22	21	21	30	32	33
Used formal help	37	23	28	54	42	45
n =	151	333	484	186	544	730

Over one-half of men (51%) compared to one-quarter (23%) of women did not confide in anyone outside their relationship prior to counselling. For these men and women, marriage counselling was the first attempt at obtaining assistance for their relationship problems.

Mayer and Timms (1970) refer to the 'discussability of personal problems', they argue that fear about admitting failure, shame or loss of self-esteem in revealing that one cannot cope with the situation, and a belief that personal problems should be resolved within the privacy of the relationship, affect the willingness of people to approach both informal and formal sources of help.

Brannen and Collard (1982) found different attitudes to self disclosure amongst men and women in their study of marriage counselling:

> 'Some men seemed to fear they might become, in Goffman's terms, stigmatized persons with "undisclosed discrediting information" (Goffman 1986:77) so that, for them disclosure would risk serious loss of status, dignity or self esteem' (p.34).

Women who were 'non-disclosers' in the Brannen and Collard study were less likely to be concerned about their self esteem and more likely to feel that their self disclosure could be interpreted as damaging to others and especially to be concerned about being disloyal to the partner. The authors found that women were more likely to have recognized and defined their marriage as problematic than their husbands. The found that:

> 'Many husbands simply did not experience their marriage as problematic for themselves. By denying the existence of problems or by avoiding the subject altogether when confronted with their wives' dissatisfaction, husbands effectively prevented the marriage from becoming a subject for debate' (p.43).

Informal Sources of Assistance

Table 29 describes the specific formal and informal sources of assistance clients turned to before marriage counselling. Overall, friends were preferred over family. Confirming the conclusions of other studies, more women (46 per cent) than men (28 per cent) turned to friends or family (34 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men), perhaps reflecting the generally wider friendship networks of women and the social acceptance of women talking about personal problems and feelings (Brannen and Collard 1982).

Separated people were more likely to confide in family than those in an intact relationship, significantly so for men, and this probably reflects a hope on the part of those not yet separated that things might improve before worrying their families. In addition, if separation is a fact there is less need to be concerned about disclosing the relationship problems to family or friends.

Others, particularly women, expressed an unwillingness to burden family or friends with their problems; rather, their desire to confide in someone outside the relationship (see Table 28) as a reason to seek professional counselling. Timms and Blampied (1985) observed that friends and relatives are sometimes judged to be inadequate resources for help with marital problems because of the concern that they would 'take sides' with one partner or another. Comments by respondents illustrate this view.

'Being able to relate to someone outside of family and friends whom you know will maintain confidentiality and have an unbiased view of the problems.' (Separated female)

'*We could discuss things without worrying about other people, friends, relatives seeing or hearing.*' (Separated female)

'*It was important to be able to confide in someone outside the family.*' (Female, in an intact relationship)

'*I was able to talk to someone independent, a third party.*' (Male in an intact relationship)

Formal Sources of Assistance

Respondents turned to a variety of professional resources before coming to counselling. As Table 30 shows, women (45 per cent) were more likely than men (28 per cent) to have turned to formal sources. The most common professional person (Table 29) turned to was a doctor (25% of women, 15% of men). Admitting to a marital problem is still unacceptable to some people and marital problems may be initially disguised as more acceptable illness symptoms. Marital stress and conflict may also precipitate a variety of symptoms that bring people to doctors.

Use of other formal services appeared higher among those who had separated. For example, 17 per cent of separated women and 11 per cent of men had sought legal advice prior to counselling. Women with a lower education level were a little more inclined to get formal assistance. In terms of age, women over 30 years of age and men over 40 years of age were the highest users of formal assistance.

Referrals to Marriage Counselling

Although seeking help is usually a voluntary process, in some cases referrals come from external sources, family, friends, a minister, doctor or lawyer. Timms and Blampied (1985) also note that when partners arrive at marriage counselling, they are often at different stages of recognition of the problem. They emphasize that it should not be assumed that all clients are seeking help. While some are, others may be having it 'thrust' upon them. Answers to the question, 'Who suggested marriage counselling at this time?', are set out in Table 31.

Women appear more motivated than men to seek assistance to resolve marital problems, and more open to discussing personal problems. Overall, 46 per cent of women compared to 28 per cent of men decided on their own to come to counselling regardless.

Sometimes it was a partner who urged attendance at counselling. As an indication that women are more aware of problems in the relationship, it is not surprising that overall, 37 per cent of men compared to 13 per cent of women stated that their partners had asked them to attend counselling.

Table 31: Who suggested marriage counselling by relationship status by sex

Expectation	Male Apart %	 Together %	 Total %	Female Apart %	 Together %	 Total %
Within relationship						
I decided	33	25	28	43	47	46
Partner asked me	30	40	37	20	11	13
Decided together	27	43	38	15	27	24
Informal						
Family member	13	10	11	15	12	13
Friend	19	11	13	22	17	19
Formal						
Community group	3	1	2	6	1	3
Professional	15	8	10	19	17	18

Women, in both intact and separated relationships, take the initiative in seeking marriage counselling.

Approximately 11 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women indicated that a family member had suggested counselling; friends had recommended counselling to 19 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men.

A professional person suggested or referred 18 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men to counselling, confirming the tendency noted previously for more women than men to have sought professional advice before coming to marriage counselling.

Who Attended Counselling First

When we look at who actually attended counselling for the first interview as recorded on the Attorney-General's form, the same patterns are evident. Men tend to come to counselling more frequently with their partner. As shown in Table 32, 69 per cent of men compared to 47 per cent of women respondents came together for the first interview, most likely at the request of their wife if we recall the responses to who suggested counselling. For the men who attended alone the first time (26%) only four per cent of their partners attended individually.

A higher proportion of women respondents (50%) attended counselling alone the first time and only three per cent of their partners attended individually. Women may be more willing to seek help for their personal problems, perhaps because their level of life satisfaction and self-esteem is lower.

Seventy-five per cent of men whose motivation for counselling was to maintain or improve the relationship came together with their partner compared to one-half of the women. It must be borne in mind, however, that more women than men attended counselling without their partner for the first session.

Table 32: Who attended first counselling session by counselling focus by sex

	Male (%)				Female (%)			
	Improve	Separate	Reconcile	Total	Improve	Separate	Reconcile	Total
I came alone to first session	18	34	50	26	47	60	47	58
My partner came alone to first session	6	—	2	4	2	5	4	3
We came together to first session	75	66	48	69	50	36	49	47
n =	220	38	58	316	329	107	49	485

When the aim of counselling is separation, women (66%) are more likely to attend without their partner than men (34%). Where the goal is reconciliation there are no differences, half attend with their partner and half come alone to the first session.

Clients were asked in the post-counselling survey whether they would have preferred to attend all sessions together, some together or all sessions by themselves. Women more than men appear to be able to use counselling to assist them personally as well as helping with relationship problems. Only four per cent of men compared to nine per cent of women stated they had wanted to attend all the sessions alone whereas 49 per cent of men compared to 27 per cent of women had wanted all the sessions together.

This pattern of men being less involved than women in seeking counselling is found in previous studies of marriage counselling conducted in Australia (NMGC 1978; Greenway and Lacar-Villaroman 1983) and overseas (Hunt 1985; Brannen and Collard 1982).

Marriage Counselling as a Resource

Our findings are consistent with Brannen and Collard (1982) who found 'that help-seeking careers of husbands and wives appear from their very beginnings to have diverged.'

Women were consistently more attuned (or perhaps feel more need) than men to seeking assistance from family, friends or professionals. The discrepancy in help-seeking between men and women suggests that for at least half the men, there was a degree of resistance to using counselling and/or a lack of recognition or unwillingness to acknowledge relationship problems. Chiriboga and Cutler (1977) refer to the socialization of men that encourages suppression of feelings or emotional problems which results in denial or lack of awareness of marital problems. It may be, of course, that men do not see or accept that the relationship is a problem requiring formal attention. This is consistent, too, with men's higher levels of life satisfaction and marital adjustment, although these men's levels of satisfaction and adjustment were still lower than the general population.

This perception of relationship problems and general dissatisfaction is no doubt the reason why women initiate counselling. Fincham and Bradbury (1987) suggest that women may be the 'barometers of marital functioning', more sensitive to marital dysfunction, because they are more dependent or invest more in marriage.

Men appear less likely to have engaged in much reality testing about their situation with others. Since they appear not to have discussed their relationship and have not previously sought help about the problems, they are likely to have less understanding and insight about their plight. Women appear to have defined the relationship as a problem and to have discussed their concerns more widely. Consequently, they are more likely to be more comfortable and articulate about discussing their relationship in a counselling situation. If they are intending to separate, then women may also be further ahead in the 'uncoupling process'.

PART THREE

POST-COUNSELLING SURVEY RESULTS

11

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

The main focus of this study was to assess the effectiveness of marriage counselling. An important component of the analysis is to distinguish between those clients who were satisfied and who benefited from the counselling they received and those who were dissatisfied and did not feel counselling assisted them.

The Post-Counselling Sample (Follow-up)

Before examining the impact of counselling on marriage counselling clients, an evaluation of the response rate to the post-counselling survey will be made. Clients were contacted by mail seven to eight months after starting counselling.

The response rate for the second stage of the study was 41 per cent, with 534 of the original 1302 respondents being retained. However, there was a significantly higher response rate for females than males — 3 males to 7 females compared with 4 males to 6 females in the first stage of the study. There was a 32 per cent response rate among the men (169 cases out of 525 cases) and a 47 per cent response rate from the females (365 cases out of 777 cases) (see Figure 1).

A comparison was made of those who are in the second survey compared to those who failed to reply. Briefly, the findings indicate that non-respondents were significantly more likely to be:

- male rather than female;
- lower educated males and females;
- males with a lower income;
- younger females;
- males with lower self-esteem;
- males who attended counselling once or twice;

- and females who felt optimistic about life in the event of the relationship ending.

Males are significantly more likely to drop out of the survey (and perhaps of counselling) if they had come to counselling already separated but hopeful of reconciliation. Males whose expectations for support from counselling were low were more likely to not participate as were males whose expectations for acquiring skills from counselling were low.

Telephone Follow-up of Non-respondents

An evaluation on non-respondents conducted by telephone found that at the time they initially came to counselling, the majority of respondents contacted by telephone were married (85 per cent); 10 per cent were in a de facto relationship and 5 per cent were not living together. These respondents had a significantly lower education level than the post-counselling survey respondents.

A higher proportion of women in the telephone survey (34 per cent), compared to the post-counselling survey women (46 per cent), had attended only one or two sessions. Approximately 40 per cent of men in both samples attended one or two sessions.

At the time of the follow-up, 34 per cent of the men in the telephone survey were living apart compared to 43 per cent in the main sample. Twenty-seven per cent of the women in the telephone sample compared to 37 per cent in the main sample were separated. More of those in the telephone sample were living together, however it must be borne in mind that these were the easiest to trace since they were the least likely to have changed their address.

Fifty-six per cent of the telephone sample men compared to 63 per cent of the main post-counselling men were satisfied with their counselling experience. The satisfaction level was higher for women (68 per cent) but lower than that of the women in the main sample (71 per cent). Things were better for 59 per cent of the men and 73 per cent of women contacted by telephone compared to 64 per cent of men and 68 per cent of women in the main survey.

Methodology

Marriage counselling effectiveness will be analysed in several ways.

1. Comparison of pre- and post-counselling scores on several individual and relationship measures will be made:
   a. individual measures: wellbeing scale, and a self-esteem scale;
   b. relationship measures: marital consensus scale, a marital satisfaction measure, and an examination of the consequences of relationship

breakdown. It should be noted that relationship measures can only be compared for those who are still together and have not separated.

2. Change in the status of the relationship after counselling will be looked at:
    a. remained together
    b. separated
    c. reconciled
    d. remained separated
3. Client satisfaction with counselling will be measured by:
    a. satisfaction with counselling received;
    b. satisfaction with the counselling experienced;
    c. satisfaction with relationship with counsellor
4. Counselling effectiveness will be examined in relation to:
    a. perceived change in the individual
    b. perceived change in the relationship
    c. perceived resolution of the problem.
5. Specific aspects of the ways in which participants felt they had been assisted will be described.

Outcomes of counselling will be discussed comparing the experience of men and women and whether they remained together or separated.

Comparison of Pre- and Post-counselling Measures

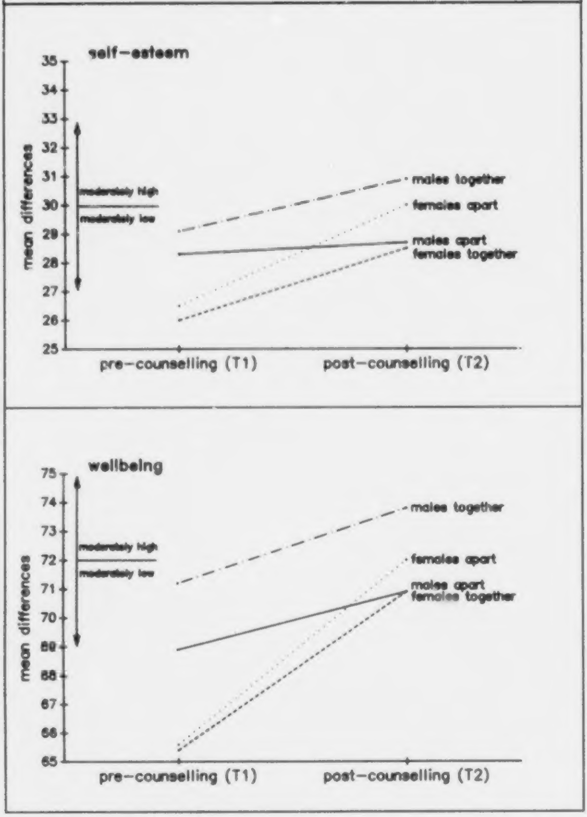
Briefly recapping the analysis from the pre-counselling survey, results showed significant differences between men and women when they present for counselling. Women have lower self-esteem, lower satisfaction with life, lower marital satisfaction and are less committed and optimistic about the future of their relationship. This recognition of the relationship problems and general dissatisfaction is no doubt the reason why they initiate counselling. However, in addition, they also have higher expectations of counselling than their partners.

Change in the scores on the wellbeing, self-esteem, marital satisfaction, and marital consensus measures from the pre-counselling survey (T1) to the post-counselling survey (T2) were examined.

Changes in wellbeing

Comparing the means of the wellbeing measures from pre-counselling to post-counselling for the total post-counselling sample, Figure 7 shows that irrespective of whether they remained together or separated there were significant improvements in women's sense of wellbeing (females together $t=5.42$, p.0001, females separated $t=4.03$, p.0001). The wellbeing of men who remained with their partner also improved significantly (males together $t=2.44$, p.00). However, there was no significant improvement for men who had separated, whereas the greatest improvement in wellbeing is experienced by separated women.

Figure 7: Pre- and post-counselling comparison – self-esteem and wellbeing



According to Headey and Wearing's wellbeing measures, above 72 on this scale would be moderately high wellbeing. The means for both males who remain with their partner and separated females reach this level. The separated males and women who remain with their spouse have a lower sense of wellbeing.

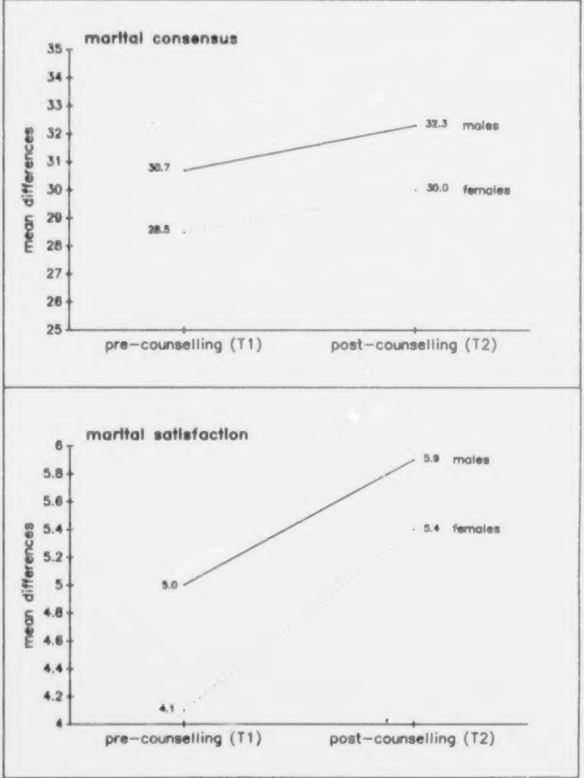
Changes in self-esteem

The findings for self-esteem are similar to those of wellbeing (Figure 7) (it should be noted that the self-esteem scale is a sub-scale of the wellbeing scale). Self-esteem improved significantly for both men and women who remained with their spouse. Separated women also increased their self esteem, but there was no significant improvement for separated males. (Males together t=3.33, p.001, males separated N.S.; females together t=5.33, p.0001, females apart 4.58, p.0001).

Changes in marital satisfaction

Changes in marital satisfaction from pre- to post-counselling were examined for those who remained in a relationship after counselling. Figure 8 shows the significant improvement in marital satisfaction (Males t=4.37, p.0001; females t=9.22, p.000) . However these means still fall in the moderately low range of satisfaction which suggests that whilst marital satisfaction may improve significantly it is still lower than that of the general Australian population (Headey and Wearing 1978, Weston 1986).

Figure 8: Pre- and post-counselling comparison – marital consensus and marital satisfaction



Changes in marital consensus

There are significant increases in the marital consensus measures for both males and females who remained in their relationship (males t=2.82, p.006; females t=3.85, p.000) which suggests lower levels of disagreement since the start of counselling.

Changes in consequences of breakdown scale

This scale considered how life would be better or worse on five different dimensions if the relationship were to end. For those still in a relationship from pre- to post-counselling there were no significant changes in the consequences measure, which evaluates the costs and benefits of leaving the relationship. It appears that the reality of how life would be better or worse if one left the relationship is stable and not influenced by counselling.

Table 33: How is life in the following areas of your life since separating?

	Separated males %	Separated females %
Standard of living		
Better	15	25
Same	31	33
Worse	54	43
	(61)	(117)
Social life		
Better	32	56
Same	28	22
Worse	40	22
	(60)	(116)
Career		
Better	22	34
Same	67	57
Worse	12	9
	(61)	(117)
Sex life		
Better	21	32
Same	13	12
Worse	66	56
	(60)	(115)
Being a parent		
Better	26	49
Same	23	37
Worse	51	14
	(35)	(84)

Those who had separated were asked similar questions about their current situation — that is, is life better or worse after separation? Results indicate that in all areas, females report life being better than separated males do, significantly so in areas relating to career, social life and parenting (Table 33).

Having considered the improvements in the various measures and demonstrated substantial increases pre- and post-counselling on most of the scales, the question that remains is to what extent are these changes due to the effects of counselling? Regression analyses were used to determine whether counselling factors contributed to these improvements. The Time 1 measure on each particular scale is used as one of the independent variables and the dependent variable is the Time 2 post-counselling score on the scale. The other variables included in the regressions were:

- age of respondent
- presence of other positive life events that might have contributed to change (present/absent)
- number of counselling sessions
- Counselling effectiveness measure — the counselling effectiveness measure is a factor-based scale of three items (Alpha reliability .791) relating to perceived improvement attributed to counselling in the individual client, his/her relationship, and the problem they came to counselling about.

Four regressions were included. Wellbeing and self-esteem have been examined as these apply to all clients, not just those who remained in the relationship. The other two are marital satisfaction and marital consensus which can only be looked at post-counselling where the client has remained in the relationship.

Table 34 shows the regression results for men and women. As one would expect, the level of wellbeing pre-counselling for men is related to the wellbeing measures post-counselling and 2accounts for 12 per cent of the variance (total adjusted r =.32, F 10.78, p.0000). However the other variables significantly related to the level of wellbeing post-counselling are perceived counselling effectiveness (beta .39, p.0000) and number of counselling sessions. In other words, males who found counselling effective are more likely to have increased their sense of wellbeing. However, those who attended counselling for many sessions had a lower sense of wellbeing post-counselling; these are likely to be those males who had greater problems.

The regression results for women show both wellbeing measures are related as expected, accounting for 21 per cent of the variance (adj. r^2=.39, F 24.6, p.0000). Counselling effectiveness is strongly related to wellbeing (beta .44) and it was also found that those who had separated had a higher sense of wellbeing.

The regression results for self-esteem were similar to those reported for wellbeing but as this is a sub-scale of wellbeing they will not be reported in detail.

The regressions using marital consensus post-counselling as the dependent variable (males F 3.9, p.006, adj. r^2 =.34, marital consensus Time 1 measure contributed 20 per cent of the variance), found counselling effectiveness to be significantly related to improvements in marital consensus for both men and women (males beta .24, p.02, females beta .34, p.0000).

The regressions for marital satisfaction post-counselling as the dependent variable found different results for 2men and women (Table 36). For the

Table 34: Multiple regression analysis of determinants of wellbeing after counselling

Wellbeing (T2) — dependent variable

Variable	Beta	Correlation	Significance
		Males	
Wellbeing	.37	.46	p.000
Age of respondent	.06	.04	NS
Other positive life events	.04	.09	NS
Together/apart (T2)	.10	−.13	NS
Number of sessions	−.16	−.18	p.03
Counselling effectiveness	.39	.43	p.000

F 10.78 p.000

r^2=.32 (other variables apart from T1 wellbeing measure account for 20% of the variance)

Variable	Beta	Correlation	Significance
		Females	
Wellbeing	.46	.49	p.000
Age of respondent	.02	−.02	NS
Other positive life events	−.005	.03	NS
Together/apart (T2)	.18	.02	p.002
Number of sessions	.002	.06	NS
Counselling effectiveness	.44	.40	p.0000

F 24.6 p.0000

r^2=.39 (other variables apart from T1 wellbeing measure account for 18% of the variance)

Table 35: Multiple regression analysis of determinants of marital consensus post-counselling

Marital consensus — dependent variable

Variable	Beta	Correlation	Significance
		Males	
Marital consensus	.46	.54	p.0000
Age of respondent	−.07	−.22	NS
Other positive life events	−.01	−.13	NS
Number of sessions	−.15	−.22	NSCounselling
effectiveness	.24	.34	p.02

F 3.9 p.006

Adj. r^2=.32 (other variables apart from T1 wellbeing measure account for 14% of the variance)

Variable	Beta	Correlation	Significance
		Females	
Marital consensus	.53	.59	p.000
Age of respondent	−.06	−.18	NS
Other positive live events	.02	.12	NS
Number of sessions	−.09	−.12	NS
Counselling effectiveness	.34	.44	p.0000

F 12.49 p.0000

r^2=.46 (other variables apart from T1 wellbeing measure account for 18% of the variance) males (F 11.67 adj $r^2=.44$), the pre-counselling measure of marital satisfaction contributed four per cent of the variance. Again it was found that perceived counselling effectiveness was related to post-counselling levels of marital satisfaction and that number of counselling sessions was negatively related to marital satisfaction after counselling.

For women the regression results were F 27.46, p.000, adj. $r^2=.49$, marital satisfaction pre-counselling contributed four per cent of the variance, and perceived counselling effectiveness was significantly related to higher marital satisfaction post-counselling.

Table 36: Multiple regression analysis of determinants of marital satisfaction post-counselling

Marital satisfaction — dependent variable Variable	Beta	Correlation	Significance
		Males	
Marital satisfaction (T1)	.21	.28	p.02
Age of respondent	−.11	−.29	NS
Other positive life events	−.08	−.11	NS
Number of sessions	−.25	−.29	p.009
Counselling effectiveness	.54	.57	p.000
F 11.67 p.0000			
Adj. $r^2=.44$ (other variables apart from T1 wellbeing measure account for 40% of the variance)			
		Females	
Marital satisfaction (T1)	.23	.34	p.0003
Age of respondent	−.04	−.25	NS
Other positive life events	.03	.19	NS
Number of sessions	−.08	−.03	NS
Counselling effectiveness	.62	.62	p.0000
F 27.26 2p.0000			
$r^{=}.49$ (other variables apart from T1 wellbeing measure account for 44% of the variance)			

Changes in Relationship Status Post-Counselling

At the start of counselling, 70 per cent of men and 73 per cent of women were living with their partner. After counselling, 60 per cent of men and 65 per cent of women were living with their partner, while 40 per cent of men and 35 per cent of women were living apart.

Figures 9 and 10 show the changes in relationship status between the two surveys. Over 50 per cent of those attending counselling were assisted in maintaining and preserving their relationship. Reconciliation occurred in 3 per cent of the men's relationships and 8 per cent of the women's

Figure 9: Relationship status pre- and post-counselling – Females

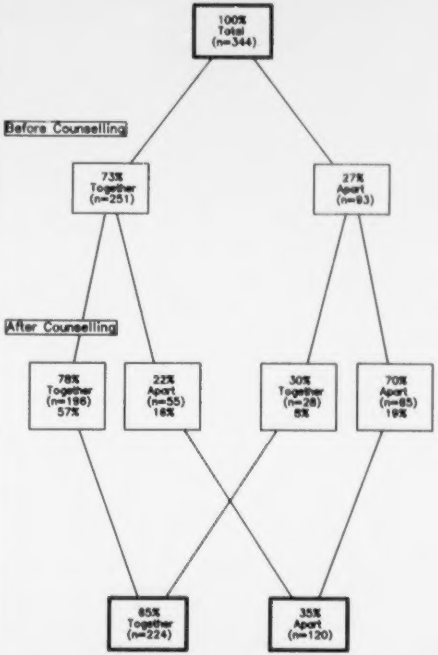
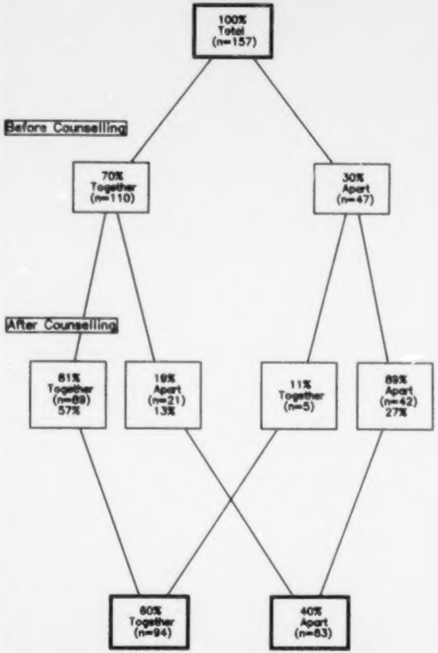

100% Total (n=344)
Before Counselling
73% Together (n=251)
27% Apart (n=93)
After Counselling
78% Together (n=196) 57%
22% Apart (n=55) 16%
30% Together (n=28) 8%
70% Apart (n=65) 19%
65% Together (n=224)
35% Apart (n=120)

Figure 10: Relationship status pre- and post-counselling – Males


100% Total (n=157)
Before Counselling
70% Together (n=110)
30% Apart (n=47)
After Counselling
81% Together (n=89) 57%
19% Apart (n=21) 13%
11% Together (n=5)
89% Apart (n=42) 27%
60% Together (n=94)
40% Apart (n=63)

relationships. It could perhaps be asserted that those remaining together have a greater chance of survival as a result of counselling. Thirteen per cent of men and 15 per cent of women separated since starting counselling, and 26 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women were already apart when they commenced counselling and have not been able to reconcile.

Relation of Counselling Goals to Relationship Status After Counselling

It is often difficult, prior to counselling, for clients to be able to articulate clearly what their counselling goals are. For this reason the counsellor's definition of the focus of counselling, where available, has been taken. By their report, as shown in Table 37, 89 per cent of men came to preserve their relationship compared to 77 per cent of women; conversely, 11 per cent of men came to separate compared to 23 per cent of women.

Table 37: Counsellor's definition of counselling focus at the start of counselling by outcome for the relationship post-counselling

		Post-counselling marital status			
	Pre-counselling	Still together		Apart	
Pre-counselling goal	%	%	n	%	n
Males					
To stay together or reconcile	89	66	(62)	34	(32)
To separate or remain separated	11	25	(2)	75	(6)
Females					
To stay together or reconcile	77	73	(132)	27	(48)
To separate or remain separated	23	38	(24)	62	(39)

For those who participated in the post-counselling sample, it can be seen that, where the goal is defined as remaining in the relationship, in 73 per cent of cases women achieved this compared to 66 per cent of men. This means that for 27 per cent of women and 34 per cent of men, counselling fails to prevent breakdown. Where the intention was to remain separated or to get assistance with the separation process a quarter of the men and 38 per cent of the women in fact remained in their relationship.

Influences on Relationship Outcome

In looking at relationship outcomes for marriage counselling clients, it is important to have some idea of the motivations and reasons for attending counselling in order to understand the outcomes of counselling. Accordingly, counselling outcomes in relation to changes in a relationship of those who were committed or not committed to a relationship pre-counselling, and whether or not they felt optimistic or pessimistic about the relationship surviving were examined. Within a relationship there can be very different motivations for attending counselling, and very different perceptions of the viability of relationships.

Commitment and the degree of optimism and pessimism about the future of their relationship at the start of counselling was significantly related to relationship status at the end of counselling 2 2for males and females (males chi 42.4, p .000; females chi 68.7, p .000). There was very little difference between males and females for those who were committed and optimistic. It is amongst those who were committed but doubtful that their relationship would survive that we see the differences between men and women. More of the men who were in this ambivalent situation remained separated (37%) compared to women (19%). Among those with low commitment, women are more likely to reconcile, whereas men are more likely to remain separated.

Another indicator of the differential levels of intention about the relationship can be seen from the responses to the question 'who made the decision to separate?' (Table 38).

Table 38: Who made the decision to separate?

	Male		Female	
Husband initiated	24%	(16)	32%	(39)
Wife initiated	58%	(39)	50%	(64)
Both decided	18%	(12)	18%	(21)

In over half of the cases in this study, where separation occurred, it was the woman alone who had initiated the action. These differences in levels of commitment and decisions to separate between men and women confirm that women are less satisfied with the relationship. Thus they are more likely to initiate counselling to resolve these issues one way or another. For this reason there is a higher rate of preservation and reconciliation amongst women whose motivation about preserving their relationship initially appeared low.

As Table 39 shows, 25 per cent of men and 30 per cent of women were more optimistic about the relationship continuing than at the time they began counselling, although a higher proportion of women than men remained pessimistic. More women (15 per cent) than men (9 per cent) were also more committed after counselling than before counselling, although more women than men were also less committed since counselling ended. Overall, men remained both more optimistic and were more committed than women to their marriages.

Table 39: Optimism about future of relationship: comparison of Time 1 and Time 2

	Males %	Females %
Optimistic Time 1 & Time 2	57	44
Not optimistic Time 1, optimistic Time 2	24	30
Optimistic Time 1, not optimistic Time 2	9	6
Not optimistic Time 1 & Time 2	10	20
Committed Time 1 & Time 2	82	64
Not committed Time 1, committed Time 2	9	15
Committed Time 1, not committed Time 2	9	13
Not committed Time 1, not committed Time 2	1	8
n	93	220

These findings highlight the 'his and her' experiences of marriage and counselling. Overall, women appear more dissatisfied with their relationship, but are also more inclined to initiate counselling in order to confront the issues and make decisions.

After counselling, individual measures of wellbeing and self-esteem improve significantly for both men and women who remain together and for separated women, but not for separated men. It appears that counselling provides women with the support and skills to cope more effectively with separation and its consequences, but does not assist men through this separation process to the same extent.

While those who remain in relationships improve their levels of marital satisfaction and marital consensus, men are still more contented with their relationship than their partners after counselling. This finding is consistent with the findings of Weston (1986) who states that the 'presence of a partner is more important to the wellbeing of men than of women, while the quality of the relationship is more crucial for women than for men'. She suggests that women have higher expectations of their relationships than men, or perhaps they are less tolerant of difficulties and more sensitive to flaws in the relationship than men.

12

CLIENT SATISFACTION WITH MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

Several aspects of satisfaction with marriage counselling was assessed: satisfaction with the counselling received, with the result or outcome of counselling, and with the counsellor relationship.

Table 40 sets out these dimensions of satisfaction with counselling in relation to the status of the relationship at the time of the follow-up.

Satisfaction With Counselling Received

Overall, at a point in time up to eight months after the commencement of counselling, 71 per cent of women and 62 per cent of men indicated they were satisfied with the marriage counselling they had received, a response rate similar to most other studies of marriage counselling overseas (Jacobson and Gurman 1986; Hooper 1985) and in Australia (NMGC 1978; Wiederkehr 1981; Hartin 1986). Over the years, information collected by the Attorney-General's Department has consistently indicated that around 70 per cent of clients who fill in a client outcome form at the end of counselling report being satisfied with counselling at that time. However, as Cramb and Hills (1982) point out, there may be 'a degree of bias due to the demand characteristics of the situation'. Clients may be reluctant to be critical of counselling if they did not want to hurt their counsellor or if they wanted further contact with the agency, which may account for the proportion of clients who were 'neutral' about counselling.

Satisfaction with counselling is significantly related to relationship status, particularly for men. There is little difference between men and women who remain together (71 per cent men, 73 per cent women), but amongst the separated, there are significant differences, with 68 per cent of women compared to 48 per cent of men satisfied with the counselling they received.

Ambivalent reactions were often related to feeling that some problems

Table 40: Satisfaction with counselling by relationship status post-counselling

	Male (%)			Female (%)		
Aspect of satisfaction	Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total
With the marriage counselling received						
Satisfied	71	48	62	73	68	71
Neutral	22	31	25	19	20	21
Dissatisfied	7	21	13	8	11	6
With the results of counselling						
Satisfied	62	41	54	61	54	58
Neutral	26	26	26	26	28	26
Dissatisfied	12	33	20	14	17	15
With the counsellor relationship						
Satisfied	88	71	82	85	77	81
Neutral	8	21	13	11	14	12
Dissatisfied	3	8	5	5	10	7
Total number	95	61	156	220	116	336

Table 41: Couple satisfaction by relationship outcome by sex

Together	Apart %	Male Total %	Together %	Apart %	Female Total %	%
Satisfaction with counselling received						
Both satisfied	57	29	47	53	43	50
I am satisfied	13	12	15	19	25	20
Partner is satisfied	22	22	13	7	1	6
Neither	8	37	25	20	31	24
n	83	41	124	161	68	230
Satisfaction with results of counselling						
Both satisfied	55	20		47	16	
I am satisfied	8	15		16	36	
Partner is satisfied	7	23		8	7	
Neither	29	43		30	25	
n	83	41		159	87	

Table 42: Couple perspective on satisfaction with counselling

Satisfaction with counselling received	
Both satisfied	54%
Satisfaction with counselling results	
Both satisfied	49%
Satisfaction with how you 'got along' with counsellor	
Both satisfied	73%

had not been resolved or the relationship status was still not as desired but the counselling received was not necessarily at fault.

'*Was in one way good — made us communicate and realise what the problems were. But in the long run it was no good, it didn't get us together again.*' (Separated male)

Since marriage counselling is primarily concerned with relationships, satisfaction levels need to be examined from the couple, as well as individual, perspective. In some instances the data allows us to look at the perspectives of both partners, either where respondents were asked how they thought their partner felt about counselling, or where both partners were in our sample.

Satisfaction results based on both partners' perspectives lowers satisfaction levels. Table 41 shows that only 47 per cent of males and 50 per cent of females reported that both partners were satisfied — considerably less than the 62 per cent and 71 per cent reported for individuals. Where both partners' perspective was obtained for the couple sample, Table 42 shows that 54 per cent of both partners were satisfied with the counselling received.

Satisfaction with the Results of Counselling

Overall, 58 per cent of women and 54 per cent of men reported satisfaction with the results of their counselling experience; 15 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men were dissatisfied with the outcome of counselling. Over a quarter of men and women had neutral feelings.

Relationship outcome was significantly related to satisfaction levels with the results of counselling. Just over 60 per cent of men and women in intact relationships were satisfied compared to 41 per cent of separated males and 54 per cent of separated females — a significant difference. Almost one-third of the separated men stated they were dissatisfied.

Couple satisfaction was significantly related to whether the couple ended up together or apart. In over 50 per cent of cases males and females who remained together reported that both partners were satisfied with counselling outcomes. However the separated husbands and wives reported different satisfaction levels within couples. Only 29 per cent of separated males reported that both partners were satisfied, compared to 43 per cent of women who felt both parties were satisfied. This suggests that separated women were over-estimating male satisfaction levels. Where there is couple data, 49 per cent were both satisfied, but these were predominantly intact relationships.

The following comments illustrate how satisfaction with the results of counselling were influenced by respondents' expectations and assumptions about their relationship and counselling.

It didn't help at all as now I am going through a divorce.' (Separated female)

Showing us what was needed to get on better together and understand each other better.' (Male in intact relationship)

Counsellor didn't get our relationship back together again.' (Separated male)

It clarified what our problems were and helped us to understand why they frustrated us.' (Female in intact relationship)

For some respondents, although the outcome of counselling for the relationship was not satisfactory, the counselling itself was appreciated:

Although It hasn't helped the relationship much, it has certainly helped me. It's allowed me to talk over my concerns instead of keeping feelings secret. It is good for me to do something for myself. I also feel less responsible for the breakdown.' (Separated male)

The same range of comments were given by those clients who did not complete the second stage of the study but who gave their opinions when contacted by telephone. Approximately 57 per cent of men and 67 per cent of women interviewed indicated they were satisfied with the counselling.

It was pretty good, made me stand up for myself. We were able to sort out our problem.' (Female in intact relationship)

I don't think counselling helped us sort out our problem or come to any solutions.' (Male in intact relationship)

Satisfaction with the Client–Counsellor Relationship

Over 81 per cent of both men and women were satisfied with the way they got along with their counsellor. The status of the relationship was significantly related to satisfaction with the counselling relationship with both men and women who were separated less satisfied with their relationship with the counsellor. Looking at satisfaction from the couple perspective we find that again it is the separated who report least couple satisfaction. Among the couples, 73 per cent were both satisfied with how they got along with their counsellor.

The relationship between the client and counsellor is considered by theorists to be the most significant factor in client satisfaction and therapy outcome (Gurman and Kniskern 1978; Lebow 1981). Qualities of warmth, empathy, and genuineness consistently have been associated with client satisfaction (Beck 1975; Gurman and Kniskern 1978; Hunt 1985). These comments by respondents tend to support this view.

I was very pleased at how comfortable the counsellor made me feel.' (Female in intact relationship)

I found the counsellor somewhat aloof, cold and judgemental, totally dissatisfied.' (Separated male)

The therapists' ability to present treatment in a manner congruent with client expectations and experience has been related to treatment outcome (Crane, Griffin and Hill 1986) as is the establishment of a 'therapeutic alliance', the degree of understanding and agreement on the goals of counselling (Hunt 1985). Kantor and Kupferman (1985) assert that the clients also 'interview' the therapist and decide what it is safe to disclose, whether the therapists' values or background and personal experiences will enable them to understand their situation, and whether the style of therapy is comfortable. The following comments are illustrative of this important relationship.

Our counsellor was marvelous. He was married with kids and was so reasonable.' (Female in intact relationship)

We were happy with the way we were approached, with the questions — the way they were put. We are very private people, it was difficult for us to approach counselling, but she was very good.' (Female in intact relationship)

The counsellor was very professional, very helpful.' (Male in intact relationship)

I did not relate well to the female. I feel my wife related to our counsellor well because she was female.' (Male in intact relationship)

The woman asked me to do things I considered silly.' (Female in intact relationship)

As part of another series of questions specifically about whether some aspects of the service offered by the counselling agency created problems, over 94 per cent of men and women indicated there was no problem with their counsellor. In open-ended comments about how counselling had failed to help, less than 10 per cent mentioned the counsellor, and when giving reasons why counselling finished when it did the counsellor was rarely mentioned. This is consistent with the high reported levels of client satisfaction with their counsellor.

Aspects of the counsellor–client relationship or counselling approach that appeared to be associated with dissatisfaction with the counselling experience will be explored in a later section.

13

COUNSELLING OUTCOMES: THE PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNSELLING

Satisfaction with counselling is generally associated with how effective counselling has been in resolving the problems brought to counselling and meeting the expectations clients had for their relationship and for themselves as individuals. Several measures of effectiveness were included in this study to assess perceived changes in several areas: problems, the relationship and individually.

Resolution of Problems

At the time of follow-up, respondents were asked to indicate how things were now, considering the problems they had come to counselling about. Table 43 sets out how respondents felt about their problems now and how much they believed marriage counselling contributed to resolving their problems.

Table 43: Clients' perceptions of problem resolution and contribution of counselling to resolving problems by relationship status

	Male (%)			Female (%)		
	Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total
How problems are now						
Better	83	37	65	78	49	68
No different	14	42	25	19	31	23
Worse	3	21	10	4	20	9
How much marriage counselling contributed to solving problems						
A great deal	32	13	23	26	19	24
Somewhat	55	26	45	51	32	44
Not at all	14	61	32	23	50	32
Total no.	95	62	157	221	118	339

Overall, approximately two-thirds of men and women believed their problems in general were better. Again the status of the relationship at follow-up affected their opinions. Amongst those who remained with their partner, 83 per cent of men and 78 per cent of women felt the problems had improved. However, just under half (49 per cent) of separated women and 37 per cent of separated males believed this. Forty-two per cent of separated males believed counselling had made no difference at all to their problems and one-fifth of separated men and women believed counselling had made things worse, particularly those whose partner wished to leave the relationship.

When asked how much they thought marriage counselling had contributed to solving their problems, almost one-quarter of men (23%) and women (24%) said a great deal and over two-fifths of men (45%) and women (44%) said somewhat. One-third of women and men said that counselling did not contribute at all to resolving their problems.

It didn't sort out the sex problems.' (Male in intact relationship)

It didn't bridge the gap between my husband's work and the family as I hoped.' (Female in intact relationship)

In fact, if we look at separated men and women, we find that 50 per cent of the women and 61 per cent of the men felt marriage counselling did not contribute anything at all to resolving their problems. The limitations of counselling to resolve all problems was articulated:

I was looking for answers that could not be found.'

And by this man, still in his marriage:

It hasn't changed my feelings toward the other woman.'

Change in the Relationship

Some respondents felt counselling changed their relationship for the better. Table 44 shows how the respondents thought their relationship had changed as a result of counselling.

Table 44: Clients' perceptions of relationship change by status of the relationship post-counselling

	Male (%)			Female (%)		
	Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total
Relationship changed as a result of counselling						
Better	73	25	55	68	30	56
No different	23	54	35	27	56	37
Worse	3	21	10	4	14	7
Total no.	94	61	155	220	111	331

Overall, approximately 55 per cent of both men and women thought their relationship had changed at least somewhat for the better as a result of marriage counselling, while 10 per cent of men and 7 per cent of women felt the relationship had changed for the worse. Again, one-third of men and women said counselling had made no difference to the relationship.

As expected, those who remained together were more satisfied with the results (73 per cent of men and 68 per cent of women) to a far greater degree than separated men (25%) and women (30%). Over half of separated men and women believed counselling had made no difference at all to the state of their relationship whereas one-fifth of separated men and 14% of separated women perceived counselling to have contributed to deterioration in the relationship.

In answer to a specific question about how satisfied respondents were about what had happened to the relationship overall, two-thirds of men and women were satisfied with what had happened to the relationship. However, only one-third of separated men compared to just over one-half of separated women were satisfied with the outcome of their relationship.

Change in Self

For many respondents, counselling was beneficial because of the individual or personal changes that occurred. Table 45 shows clients' perceptions of how counselling changed themselves and their partners. Three quarters of those who were still in their relationship felt they had personally changed for the better as a result of counselling (75 per cent of males, 73 per cent of females). Two-thirds of separated females also believed they had changed for the better, but less than half the separated males (47 per cent) believed they had made personal gains.

Table 45: Clients' perceptions of personal and partner change by status of the relationship post-counselling

	Male (%)			Female (%)		
	Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total
Personally changed as a result of counselling						
Better	75	47	64	73	67	71
No different	23	47	33	25	30	27
Worse	2	7	4	2	3	2
Partner changed as a result of counselling						
Better	62	29	53	62	33	52
No different	33	49	37	37	57	44
Worse	5	22	10	2	10	4
Total no.	95	62	157	220	115	335

Since women more than men had been dissatisfied with personal aspects of their lives as discussed in previous sections, it is not surprising that there would be greater opportunities to feel assisted by counselling in personal areas.

Whether or not respondents felt there had been any gains resulting from marriage counselling or if any gains had been maintained up to the time of the follow-up affords another measure of how counselling was perceived.

Table 46 shows respondents' answers to the general question, 'Have the gains, if any, resulting from marriage counselling lasted up to this time?'

Table 46: Clients' perceptions of gains maintained as a result of counselling by status of the relationship post-counselling

	Male (%)			Female (%)		
	Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total
Have the gains resulting from counselling been maintained?						
Yes	77	31	58	67	35	57
No	9	2	5	8	13	10
No gains	15	68	36	25	52	33
Total no.	94	62	156	216	112	328

While the overall proportion of men and women who felt gains had been maintained were approximately the same (58% men and 57% women), the status of the relationship significantly affected this response. Approximately 68% of separated men and 52% of separated women believed there had been no gains resulting from marriage counselling compared to 15% of men and 25% of women who remained together who felt this way. Again, a majority of men (77%) and women (67%) who remained together believed they had made gains from counselling which were maintained. Women who were in intact relationships, nevertheless, were less optimistic about gains made or maintained than men who were together, suggesting that these women were still not entirely satisfied with the state of their relationship despite remaining together.

Effectiveness from the Couple Perspective

The couple perspective is shown in Table 47. For 61 per cent of couples in our sample, both partners considered their problems had improved. For fifty-five per cent of the couples, both partners believed their relationship had changed for the better and in 66 per cent of cases both partners were satisfied with what had happened to the relationship. On a personal level, 54 per cent of couples agreed both partners had changed for the better as individuals. Where gains had been achieved, 52 per cent of both partners agreed these gains had been maintained.

Table 47: Couple perspective on satisfaction and counselling effectiveness

Problems improved	
Both perceive improvement	61%
Satisfaction with what happened to relationship	
Both satisfied	66%
Change in relationship	
Both changed for better	55%
Individual client changed for better	
Both changed	54%
Have gains lasted (where gains achieved)	
Both agree	52%
Commitment to relationship (for those still in relationship)	
Both committed	67%
Chance of separation	
Both perceive is low	65%

If we look at levels of commitment and confidence in the future of the relationship, amongst those still in their relationship 67 per cent of couples both feel committed to their relationship and, in 65 per cent of cases both partners believe the chances of their relationship breaking up are low.

Couple information gleaned from those whose partner attended counselling enabled some insight into whether or not both changed as a result of counselling. Table 48 shows that amongst those still together, 58 per cent of males and 55 per cent of females reported that both partners changed for the better as a result of counselling. Amongst the separated, 20 per cent of males and 26 per cent of females reported that both changed for the better. Separated males reported that, in 44 per cent of cases, neither partner changed for the better, but only 28 per cent of females reported that neither changed for the better. Separated women appear to believe that they themselves changed whilst their partner did not.

Table 48: Respondents' view of couple or partner change by status of the relationship post-counselling

	Male (%)			Female (%)		
	Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total
How much have both of you changed as a result of counselling?						
Both better	58	20	46	55	26	47
I am better	16	27	20	20	39	26
Partner is better	5	10	6	7	7	7
Neither	21	44	28	18	28	21
Total no.	83	41	124	163	70	234

14

PREDICTORS OF PERCEIVED COUNSELLING EFFECTIVENESS

A number of factors have been found to be associated with the effectiveness of counselling as reported in the literature. Jacobson and Gurman (1986) and Gurman, Kniskern and Pinsof (1986) in their review of marital therapy outcomes identified relationship variables as predictive of treatment outcome. In many of these studies, positive outcome is equated with improvement in marital satisfaction measures. The authors conclude that 'the quality of emotional affection' pre-counselling, including level of commitment, sexual satisfaction and feelings of togetherness, is a predictor of post-counselling satisfaction. Lower scores pre-counselling result in less degree of improvement.

The literature reports inconsistent effects of other variables, particularly demographic variables on the effectiveness of counselling. One reason for this may be that many studies reported have fairly homogeneous samples. Some studies have indicated that younger couples benefit more from marital therapy than older couples (Jacobson and Gurman 1986, Gurman, Kniskern and Pinsof 1986). Cramb and Hills (1982) found length of the relationship (closely correlated with age) to influence outcome — those in longer term relationships benefited less. Beck and Jones (1973) reported little differences in outcome related to socio-economic status.

Regression results presented earlier in this section of the report showed how counselling had contributed significantly to wellbeing, self-esteem, marital satisfaction and improvements in marital consensus post-counselling. Rather than examine an overall measure of effectiveness as used previously, in this section an attempt will be made to identify the predictors of two dimensions of effectiveness, namely:

1. whether counselling contributed to perceived improvement in the client's relationship or not
2. whether counselling contributed to any perceived improvement in the client personally or not.

To identify the characteristics that distinguish between those who found counselling effective or not effective for themselves individually or for their relationship the following variables were included in discriminant function analyses.

A measure of satisfaction with social life and friends was used to measure the degree of social integration or isolation. Since commitment to the relationship and marital satisfaction have been correlated with positive client outcomes, the following measures were included: marital satisfaction at the start of counselling, the level of the commitment to the relationship and the degree of optimism about the relationship continuing. As there are perceived costs and benefits to remaining in or leaving a relationship (Levinger 1976; Udry 1981), we measured perceptions of whether life would be better or worse if one left the relationship. Measures of whether or not the respondent had children, length of relationship, and whether or not the client remained in their relationship or separated were also included.

Other measures added were the number of counselling sessions attended, whether or not the respondent had initiated counselling, and expectation about wanting to acquire skills from counselling (indicating an active interest in change).

Four stepwise discriminant function analyses were conducted to identify the predictors of perceived counselling effectiveness both for the individual personally and for their relationship.

Discriminant Function Analysis to predict counselling effectiveness for the relationship:

The aim of this type of analysis is to establish and appropriately weight a set of variables to best predict membership of a group — in this case — clients who believed counselling had assisted in improving their relationship.

The best predictors of effectiveness in order of importance for men were found to be:

- remaining in the relationship
- having children.

No other variables were predictors of counselling effectiveness for the relationship. It was found that 74 per cent of cases were correctly classified and the canonical correlation was .49 p .0000. As Table 49 shows, remaining in the relationship is considerably more important a predictor than having children.

The best predictors for counselling effectiveness in order of importance for women are:

- Remaining in the relationship
- Initial marital satisfaction
- Attending more counselling sessions
- Initial optimism about the future of the relationship
- Shorter duration of relationship
- Expectation of counselling to acquire skills.

Seventy-two per cent of cases were correctly classified and the canonical correlation was .49 p.0000.

Perceived effectiveness for the relationship for men seems very much

Table 49: Discriminant function analysis for predicting perceived relationship improvement as a result of counselling for male and female clients

Analysis 1	Males n = 137	Standard Discriminant Function Coefficients
Together/apart post-counselling		1.00
Have children/no children		.28
Percentage of cases correctly classified 74%		
Canonical Correlation .49 p.0000		
Analysis 2	Females n = 290	Standard Discriminant Function Coefficients
Together/apart post-counselling		.53
Marital satisfaction		–.43
Number of sessions		–.34
Optimism about relationship surviving (T1)		.28
Length of relationship		.24
Came to counselling to acquire skills		–.20
Percentage of cases correctly classified 72%		
Canonical Correlation .49 p.0000		

more dependent on retaining their spouse and having family responsibilities, whereas for women in addition to retaining the relationship it is more related to the level of satisfaction with the relationship and counselling factors.

Discriminant Function Analyses to predict counselling effectiveness for the client personally:

Discriminant function analyses for predicting the effectiveness of counselling in assisting clients personally showed that the best predictors for men in order of importance were:

- Remaining in the relationship
- Believing life would be worse without the relationship
- Attending more counselling sessions
- Satisfaction with social life and friendships
- Initial optimism about relationship surviving
- Initial commitment to the relationship

It appears that for men to gain from counselling personally they need to be highly motivated to retain their relationship. The discriminant function analysis correctly classified 70 per cent of cases. Canonical correlation .47 p .000.

The best predictors for women were in order of importance were:

- Attending more counselling sessions
- Initial marital satisfaction
- Initial optimism about relationship surviving
- Expectations of counselling to acquire skills
- Initiated counselling

Table 50: Discriminant function analysis for predicting those who found they personally improved as a result of counselling for males and females

Analysis 1 Males n=138	Standard Discriminant Function Coefficients
Together/apart post-counselling	−.74
Options available if separated	.67
Number of sessions	.62
Social and friends satisfaction (T1)	.34
Optimism about relationship surviving	.28
Commitment to relationship	.22
Percentage of cases correctly classified 70%	
Canonical Correlation .47 p.0000	
Analysis 2 Females n=292	Standard Discriminant Function Coefficients
Number of sessions	.65
Marital satisfaction (T1)	.58
Optimism about relationship surviving	.46
Came to counselling to acquire skills	.41
Initiated counselling	.32
Had children/no children	.28
Committed to relationship (T1)	−.24
Percentage of cases correctly classified 73%	
Canonical Correlation .35 p.0000	

- Having children
- Committed to the relationship

For women, whether or not they remained with their spouse was not a significant factor. Seventy-three per cent of cases were classified correctly. Canonical correlation .35 p .0000. (The variable relating to consequences if the relationship failed had 50 missing cases and was dropped from the women's discriminant function analyses after checking that it was not significantly predicting effectiveness on either measure.

There were similarities and differences in predictors of effectiveness between men and women. Both men and women felt that remaining in the relationship was important if counselling was effective for their relationship. If men were to gain personally from counselling, staying in the relationship was also an important factor. For women, expectations of counselling and initiating counselling were also predictors. For both men and women being positive about their relationship at the onset of counselling were predictors of effectiveness. This suggests that counselling is more effective with those who have less severe relationship problems.

15

ASSISTANCE FROM COUNSELLING

Information on how counselling helped clients, or failed to help clients, was gathered in several ways. Respondents were asked how counselling assisted them, using, in most instances, the same items they had been asked at the outset of counselling in relation to what they hoped to gain from counselling. At the start of counselling, clients were asked about their expectations for the outcome of their relationship — to improve or prevent breakdown, get back together again, or get help deciding about separation. In addition, they were asked questions about what they hoped to gain from counselling individually and for their relationship. Basically, expectations centred around three main issues: gaining insight about themselves and their relationship, acquiring skills to deal with individual and relationship problems, and getting emotional support.

Because what is meant by being assisted, being helped or a positive change may mean different things to different people, qualitative accounts were also obtained. Respondents were asked to describe in their own words how counselling helped them, or failed to help them. Eighty-three per cent of respondents gave some open-ended comment on how counselling helped them, and 57 per cent commented on how counselling could have helped them more.

An examination will be made of the quantitative data first, and this will be followed by a summary of clients' qualitative perceptions of how counselling helped, or failed to help them.

Table 51 sets out how counselling assisted clients by sex and relationship status post-counselling. This will not be discussed in detail because a factor solution on this data has produced scales which summarise these findings.

However, amongst those who remained in their relationship, 80 per cent of men and 70 per cent of women believed counselling helped them improve their relationship and prevent breakdown. Amongst the separated, 43 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women believed counselling assisted them with the separation process.

Table 51: Measures of counselling assistance by relationship status post-counselling and sex

	Male		Female		
	Together %	Apart %	Together %	Apart %	Total %
Relationship factors					
Improve relationship	80	22	70	19	53
Prevent relationship breakdown	80	15	69	10	49
Get back together	61	9	47	11	35
Assist separation process	72	43	8	55	25
Individual assistance					
Sort out thoughts and feelings	92	78	85	80	84
Change yourself	75	52	70	50	64
Obtained support and understanding	65	60	72	73	70
Specific advice	62	47	61	53	58
Decisions about life	58	55	65	59	61
Develop better personal relationships	77	51	68	51	64
Solve personal problems	68	55	72	61	66
Learn techniques to handle things	77	50	73	61	67
Gain confidence in self	36	34	55	61	51
Confide in someone	65	68	76	70	70
Relationship assistance					
Settle differences	67	25	55	27	47
Improve communication	68	51	69	46	61
Help handle conflict	68	43	65	50	59
Understand what went wrong	69	63	65	73	67
Understand what happened	85	73	79	70	77
Understand partner better	78	53	73	51	66
Bring about changes in partner	49	22	49	18	38
Enable partner to see mistakes	49	32	54	31	45
Enable you to see mistakes	78	72	78	64	73
Help partner understand you better	58	31	64	30	51
Accept an unacceptable situation	59	54	61	41	55
Bring things out in open	75	60	75	64	70
n=	95	68	223	126	516

Irrespective of gender or relationship outcome, between half to three-quarters of clients believed counselling helped them make decisions about their lives, understand what had gone wrong, helped them solve some of their personal problems and enabled them to see some of the mistakes they had made.

In all instances (with the exception of separated women who gained confidence in themselves more than women still in relationships) men and women who remained together gained more assistance than those who were separated.

Overall, women had higher initial expectations of counselling than men. Post-counselling, both men and women were assisted by counselling.

Excluding items which related specifically to the outcome of their relationship, factor analysis on the remaining items set out in Table 48 revealed that counselling assisted marriage counselling clients in four main ways.

- The acquisition of skills: helping clients to acquire skills to deal with personal and relationship problems enabled clients to change, to handle things more effectively, to develop better relationship skills, and to communicate better and handle conflict.
- Facilitate change in relationship: by increasing understanding within the relationship clients were able to settle differences and this improvement enabled change to occur.
- Gaining insight: counselling assisted clients to gain insight into themselves and their relationship, including where it had gone wrong.
- Emotional support: clients were able to confide in someone outside their situation and gain confidence in themselves, obtain advice on what to do and also obtain support and understanding.

Set out below are details of these scales.

Scale 1: Acquire Skills
(Alpha Reliability .8715 8-item scale)

Items	*Factor loading*
Change yourself	.7339
Learn some techniques to handle things more effectively	.6863
Develop better personal relationships	.6573
Solve some personal problems	.6635
Improve the way you communicate	.5858
Help you to handle conflict	.4976
Enable you to see your mistakes	.4225
Accept a previously unacceptable situation	.3840

Scale 2: Facilitate change in relationship
(Alpha Reliability .8509, 5-item scale)

Items	*Factor loading*
Helped partner understand you better	.8325
Enabled partner to see his/her mistakes	.8302
Brought about change in partner	.7986
Settled your differences	.6107
Brought things out in the open	.6093

Scale 3: Gain insight in relationship
(Alpha Reliability .8105, 3-item scale)

Items	*Factor loading*
Helped understand what went wrong	.7903
Helped understand what was happening in relationship	.7794
Helped understand your partner better	.5834

Scale 4: Gain emotional support
(Alpha Reliability .8017, 6-item scale)

Items	*Factor loading*
Confided in someone outside relationship	.7647
Obtained support and understanding	.7561
Gained confidence in yourself	.6190
Made decisions about your life	.5069
Obtained specific advice on what to do	.4897
Sorted out thoughts and feelings	.4567

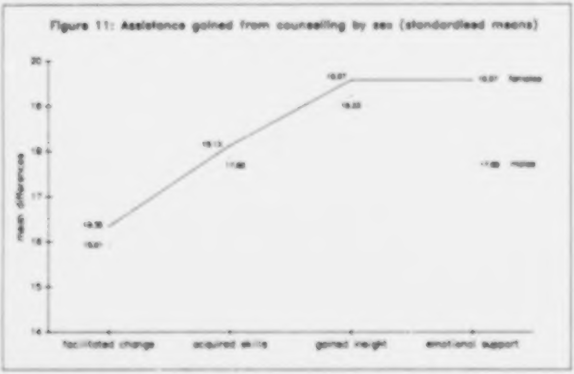


Figure 11: Assistance gained from counselling by sex (standardised means)

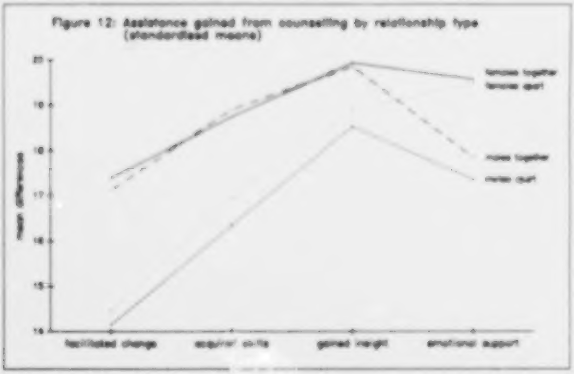


Figure 12: Assistance gained from counselling by relationship type (standardised means)

Figure 11 shows, a comparison of standardised means shows that the most widely recognized assistance by women was gaining insight into what had gone wrong in their relationship, and receiving emotional support. Men also reported they had gained insight and understanding of their relationship; however, they were significantly less likely than women to acknowledge receiving emotional support from counselling. Men were less inclined to have sought counselling for emotional support in the first instance. There were no significant differences between men and women on acquiring skills to cope with individual and relationship problems. Assistance in facilitating change in their relationship was acknowledged least by both men and women.

Figure 12 shows that assistance received from counselling is related to relationship outcome. Whether separated or together, both husbands and wives believed they had gained insight into their relationships, separated males having the lowest mean. There were significant differences between men and women on emotional support received. Men and women who were still together post-counselling gained more skills and learned more from counselling than those who separated, and as one would expect it is unlikely that those who separated would be assisted in these ways.

Satisfaction with counselling, and perceived improvements as a result of counselling, were positively correlated with all four measures of assistance for men and women. Education was not correlated with these four types of assistance, nor was age for men, however younger women were significantly more likely to gain insight into their situation than older women. Self-esteem was not correlated with any of the four assistance measures for men but was positively correlated with all types of assistance for women. Feelings that counselling facilitated change in the relationship and that one learned skills from the counselling experience were significantly correlated with remaining together for both men and women.

Responses to the open-ended questions extend our understanding of how counselling was or was not effective by illustrating how clients perceived the help or the lack of help they received from counselling. Generally women gave more detailed comments on how counselling was helpful, not helpful or what could have helped more. These qualitative comments were coded and are summarised in Table 52.

The themes that emerge from the respondents' comments are similar to those summarized in the scales. Comments concerning communication skills and handling conflict relate broadly to the area of helping clients acquire skills. Clarifying issues, enabling recognition of problems and helping clients accept their situation are associated with gaining insight. Confiding in someone outside their relationship and gaining self esteem can be equated with the emotional support that counselling provides.

Where counselling was not perceived as helpful it was often related to not being able to change the situation, for example persuading a spouse to stay in a relationship or being able to get a reluctant partner to come for

Table 52: Summary of qualitative comments relating to how counselling helped or did not help marriage counselling clients.

	Males		Females	
	Tog. %	Apart %	Tog. %	Apart %
How Counselling Helped:				
Help acquiring skills:	(44)	(27)	(45)	(28)
Improved communication	38	22	37	20
Learned to handle conflicts	14	7	13	8
Clarification and insight:	(46)	(41)	(45)	(49)
Helped clarify issues	30	24	32	35
Enabled self to see problem	10	13	12	11
Enabled partner see problem	4	6	7	11
Acceptance of situation	2	15	5	11
Emotional Support:	(16)	(21)	(32)	(39)
Improved self esteem	1	7	14	24
Confide in someone outside situation	15	7	13	8
How Counselling Least Helpful:				
Situation Related:	(14)	(—)	(24)	(36)
Not able to change situation or partner	13	18	14	26
Partner would not come	4	—	11	12
Criticism of Counselling:	(23)	(36)	(27)	(38)
Did not acquire skills, get advice	12	15	12	17
Counsellor style	9	18	11	14
Frequencies of sessions	2	—	8	9
Raised idea of separation	1	6	1	3
Biased towards marriage	—	3	1	1

(Figures in brackets are combined open-ended responses; these are multiple responses items.)

counselling. In many circumstances these situations are beyond the control of counselling.

Counselling was most unhelpful because the problem was between two people only one (me) of whom sought counselling'. (Separated female)

Well, she wants to leave and that's all there is to it'. (Separated male)

It can't solve my problems as my partner can't face anything'. (Female in intact relationship)

One of the roles of counselling as defined previously is to enable clients to confront reality and integrate the experiences in a more positive way.

Whilst the acquiring of skills was one of the main expectations clients had of counselling and one of the areas where they were assisted most, Table 41 shows that for some this is also an area where some clients believed counselling had failed them.

The remaining areas where clients believed they had not had their needs met related broadly to the particular style of the counsellor, the operation of the agency or a perception amongst a few clients that there was a bias towards marriage or separation.

Rather than discuss Table 41 in detail, the broad themes will be discussed using examples of case studies to illustrate the complexity of the situations that counselling deals with.

Clarification and Insight

One of the major themes was that counselling enabled clients to clarify their thoughts and feelings in a supportive environment, gaining insight and understanding about their own or their partner's contribution to what was happening or had happened in the relationship. These case studies where we have both partner's views of counselling help to show this:

Case 1: a separated couple
Jane was not happy living with her partner. As Ted put it: 'My wife did not want to live with me any more, and I wanted to find out if counselling could show us what went wrong in our relationship and see if we could rebuild it'.

Jane found counselling made it easier to explain things to Ted and he found that counselling helped him 'to see what went wrong in the marriage, but it did not make any difference to Jane mainly because we came to counselling too late.'

Case 2: a de facto relationship
This couple came to counselling to sort out their future plans regarding marriage and children. He was feeling uncertain about their future, and she defined the problem as 'my partner felt I was trying to dominate the relationship. I felt he was being too slow making decisions and I was running out of patience'. They both found counselling useful as he said 'It was unbiased, pin-pointed the problems, and helped us understand how they had come about. It also helped us with techniques to resolve some of these conflicts'. His girlfriend expressed this as 'It clarified what our problems were, and helped us to understand why they frustrated us'.

Case 3: married couple
This highly conflictual couple came to counselling because in his words 'Fighting with spouse over 90% per cent of all elements of day to day living', and in her words 'Heated arguments too often disrupting family harmony'. For them counselling was of assistance. In his words 'It held a mirror to the relationship and exposed the effects that other relatives in particular were having on our marriage'. His wife found that 'It helped me not to be so emotional when we have a point of difference. It also helped me to respect my partner's point of view'.

Acquiring Skills

Another of the major themes was learning techniques to resolve conflicts and problems more effectively and improve communication. Below are two case studies which demonstrate how counselling helped clients acquire skills:

Case 4: married couple
The husband defined the problem as a lack of effective communication. He felt that 'They both said things they regretted in the heat of the argument'. His wife's change in working hours had, in his mind, introduced extra strain on the family. He felt they were having too many destructive arguments. His wife defined their problems as being unable to communicate effectively and the husband not coping with additional stress. She was also feeling rejected.

Counselling helped them both. He found it enabled them to work out what was important in their relationship, and they learned 'not to be afraid to talk truthfully about feelings rather than cover them up'. The wife found she was able to cope better with her partner's moodiness and attitudes. She found her acceptance of the relationship was more realistic. When considering the least helpful aspects of counselling the husband said he sometimes felt that he was being put under pressure to change. . . 'my spouse said that too — but later found this was not to be a problem'.

Case 5: married couple
This couple came with major problems relating to domestic violence. The presenting problems according to the wife were "Violence, conflict, anger, abuse, involving both of us and the children." She also felt very depressed. The husband acknowledged that the problem was to do with domestic violence and parenting issues.

They both found counselling helpful, as he said 'It improved our communication — we have an evening set aside now to talk things over. Counselling also made me see my own selfishness as a cause of much of the discord. We learnt some child management techniques'.

The counselling enabled the wife 'To understand myself better. Helped me to learn ways of dealing with anger and expressing it. Helped me and my spouse find better ways to communicate and raise our children'. She also wished counselling had been able to help more with her depression, and it would have been good if it had changed some of her husband's attitudes.

Acquiring communication skills and techniques for handling conflict were areas where some clients received help. Other clients found that counselling was least helpful in this area, as these quotes suggest:

'I was hoping that we would have learned some strategies to deal with conflicts in the future. After four sessions of talking we felt that we had gone as far along that course as necessary. I still wish the counselling had tried to teach us something . . . I felt it was too passive'. (Female in intact relationship)

'*I would have liked to learn more skills in how to argue properly . . . keeping to the topic, keeping in control, accepting unresolved issues etc*'. (Female in intact relationship)

'*I think if our approach to each other could have been studied, arguments between us observed by the counsellor and rerun with more appropriate input as suggested by an outsider. We both need to be caring of each other's feelings, conversations become a battleground, and hostilities are caused by even one word said or taken incorrectly*'. (Male in intact relationship)

Emotional Support

The provision of emotional support had components of increasing and maintaining self esteem, reassurance about separation decisions and assistance with the process and consequences of separation. Another component was the opportunity to confide in an outside, neutral person.

'*Being able to talk to someone else, I get a different perspective, ideas*'. (Male in intact relationship)

'*It has helped us to remain good friends since separation. We communicate well now*'. (Separated female)

'*Helped me to feel better about myself and understand myself. I gained some self-esteem*'. (Separated female)

In some cases, counselling was perceived as providing reassurance or reinforcement for a decision to leave a relationship.

'*It helped me decide that the relationship was finished*'. (Separated male).

'*It probably gave me the courage to make it on my own*'. (Separated female)

For some respondents there was acknowledgement that while counselling had been useful to one partner, it did not always have the same benefit to the other partner.

'*It made my wife more determined about her new life, space and room to grow she said*'. (Separated male)

Case 6: separated couple

In another situation where the couple separated the husband felt that counselling had helped because 'I felt that even though this relationship had failed, I was not a failure. I was a special person who had qualities that could be valued in a new relationship. It gave me hope. Also the issues that needed to be dealt with were brought right out in the open and the fighting was over very quickly'. The wife found counselling had helped her to 'reestablish myself outside the relationship and go on to better things'.

Clients were given another opportunity to express their feelings about their perceptions of how counselling affected them. To counter any potential bias towards positive answers these questions were posed in the negative (Table 53).

Table 53: Client's perceptions of negative aspects of counselling by the relationship status post-counselling

		Males			Females			
		Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total	Total
Problem	Agreed	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Brought up things I didn't want to talk about		65	52	62	59	60	55	57
Made relationship worse		10	12	17	28	18	14	15
Upset me too much		13	18	15	17	28	21	19
Did not solve the problem		39	51	55	74	62	55	54
Total*		93	222	69	121		508	

* overall total which varies by 1–3 respondents for each question

Sixty per cent of men and 55 per cent of women found that counselling brought up things they didn't want to talk about. Sometimes clients found counselling 'too upsetting':

'Many memories were brought to the surface causing inner hurt and self-conflict'. (Separated female)

'Confrontation resulted between us when things were dragged up from the past'. (Separated male)

'My wife would come home primed for nagging sessions'. (Male in intact relationship)

Some clients felt counselling made their relationship worse (17 per cent men and 14 per cent women), those who are separated are more likely to feel the situation was made worse (28 per cent of separated men and 18 per cent of separated women). Others felt it "upset them too much" (15 per cent men and 21 per cent women). More of the separated people, particularly women, believed this. This may be because they had hoped for a reconciliation which did not occur.

'It did not bring my wife and family back together again'. (Separated male)

'It just didn't bring my husband back to me'. (Separated female)

Over 55 per cent of men and women stated that counselling did not solve their problems. However, as the case study material shows, counselling may not be able to solve all clients' problems. Its aims are to assist couples confront problems and develop strategies for coping with these problems, and adjust to living within the relationship or be assisted to separate with a minimum of pain and damage to self esteem.

One of the functions of counselling is to enable clients to explore and confront difficult issues within their relationship in a supportive atmosphere with professional assistance. Naturally, this may evoke unpleasant emotions and raise issues that may have gone unacknowledged or unrecognized by one or both partners.

'I suppose one faces up to the truth of oneself, good and bad points. It is not always pleasant to hear, but if being realistic enough we can do our best to change and at least make an effort that is something'. (Separated female)

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NUMBER AND TYPE OF INTERVIEWS

Considerable debate has centred on whether the number of interviews clients attend affects the outcomes of counselling (Gurman and Kniskern 1981; Beck 1975). Nationally, according to the Attorney-General's Department figures, 22 per cent of all agency clients attend for only one session.

Twenty-three per cent of men and 27 per cent of women who participated in the follow-up survey attended for one or two sessions. Table 54 shows the number of interviews for respondents in the follow-up study.

Table 54: Number of interviews

Interviews	Males		Females	
	per cent	No.	per cent	No.
1–2	23	(37)	27	(95)
3–4	25	(40)	27	(96)
5–6	23	(37)	22	(77)
7+	30	(49)	24	(84)

One would expect that satisfaction with counselling would be related to the number of sessions attended since there would be greater opportunity to have problems resolved. However, this study found that results differed for men and women. The more interviews women had, the greater their satisfaction with counselling (pearson $r = .25$, p.000), but there was not a significant relationship for men. However there were significant positive correlations between number of sessions and the assistance received with their relationship (males $r=.20$, p.006; females $r=.35$, p.000), and the assistance they received for themselves generally (males $r=.20$, p.01; females r-.36, p.000).

Approximately half of men and women who attended one or two sessions indicated they were satisfied with their counselling experience and found it helpful on dimensions of change in themselves and their relationship.

This comment from a client contacted by telephone who attended for one interview supports this view:

'The things he talked about with us in the one and one-half hour interview we were talking about for months afterward.' (Woman in intact relationship)

Other studies have concluded that one or two interviews can benefit clients by providing information, reassurance or advice that can have some impact or resolve a specific situation, although more interviews are deemed necessary if behavioural changes are to take place and skills to be learned (Hunt 1985; Weiderkehr 1981). Coming to counselling for even one interview may also spark motivation to work on a problem without further assistance, as these clients illustrate:

'She said go away and work out what you want and then come back. We worked it out and didn't need to come back.' (Man in intact relationship)

'Because he knew I was going, and was serious, that helped too. Explained alternatives, learned to react differently and not to get involved in his anger.' (Woman in intact relationship)

At the other end of the spectrum, some clients who had attended for a greater number of sessions were dissatisfied or perceived that their situation had worsened or that no improvement had taken place. Perhaps these men continued to attend in hope of restoring a relationship or were disappointed that counselling could not change their situation. In some cases this may have meant a referral to individual counselling or other services would have been more appropriate.

Joint or Individual Sessions

Table 55 sets out the numbers of interviews attended individually or jointly with a partner.

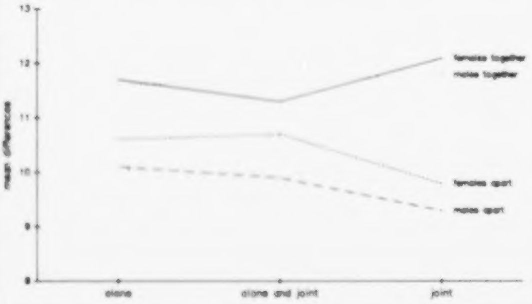
Table 55: Type of sessions by relationship outcome

	% Male			% Female		
	Together	Apart	Total	Together	Apart	Total
Individual sessions	9	27	18	28	35	28
Individual and joint	37	46	41	47	42	27
Joint only	54	27	40	29	23	45
Total number	94	71		223	118	

Men were more likely to attend all sessions with their partner in contrast to women who were more likely to attend on their own. Nine per cent of women compared to 4 per cent of men had indicated they would have preferred to attend all sessions on their own. Conversely, more women than men complained that their partners would not attend counselling. When type of sessions is looked at by whether or not clients remained together or separated after counselling, it can be seen that men who remained with their partner were significantly more likely to have only had joint sessions (Table 55). Very few males who remained together had come to counselling for individual sessions alone. Separated women (35 per cent) were the group most likely to have had only individual counselling. It is notable that over 70 per cent of separated couples came jointly to counselling.

Figure 13 illustrates the relationship between type of interview and improvement from counselling. There was least improvement for those separated men and women who only had joint sessions. Although these differences are small, they suggest that those who separate would perhaps benefit from counselling more if they stayed on for some individual sessions post-separation.

Figure 13: Perceived improvement by type of sessions



Although Gurman and Kniskern (1978) categorically concluded that couples who are seen jointly during counselling benefit the most, other research suggests that sometimes when only one partner attends counselling it can be beneficial (Hunt 1985). It is unclear whether the benefit referred to is related to improvement in the relationship alone or includes individual improvement since some studies have shown that counselling may benefit one partner, particularly women who improve in confidence and self-esteem, although the relationship itself does not improve.

'I feel it helped me grow personally although the marriage changed little and only for a short time because of it.' (Separated woman)

'My husband attended only once with me then refused to go, but I still went and appreciated very much the caring, but unemotional, counselling.' (Woman in intact relationship)

Retention of Clients

Why clients drop out of counselling prematurely (for example, after one interview) has been the subject of much speculation.

Client expectations of what counselling can realistically provide may be related to whether clients remain in counselling. Krupinski and Marshall (1967) found that clients, especially men, who expected counselling to bring their partner back were more likely to only attend one session. Hunt (1985) reported that clients who attended only once or twice appeared to come to counselling as a last resort and had little motivation to change the situation. Nixon (1988), in a small study investigating the failure of clients to keep initial intake interviews, found that the refusal of a partner to attend was a major factor in not keeping the appointment. It may be recalled that 12 per cent of women indicated this was a reason counselling was not helpful to them.

In their analysis of the factors contributing to premature termination of counselling at the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria, Krupinski and Marshall (1967) found that those who attended for one interview only were also more likely to have a lower education level, to be non-English-speaking, to be those who attended without a spouse, as well men who expected counselling to bring their wife back. Gaunt (1985) also found men more likely to drop out after one session.

Counsellor 'style' also appears to contribute to retention rates of clients in counselling. Although we are unable to determine whether those clients who dropped out of the study did so because they did not respond to the counselling approach offered, we can look at what respondents said about their counselling experience. The perception of counselling as directive rather than reflective in approach appears relevant.

It was earlier noted that 14 per cent of men and women felt counselling had not been helpful because they were not given specific advice, guidance or concrete techniques to handle problems. Another third of men and women who had expected advice on what to do or techniques for handling problems claimed these expectations had not been met.

Nevertheless, it was the 'non-specific' (Strupp 1986) therapeutic factors in counselling — understanding, encouragement, support and clarification of feelings — that were identified specifically by one-third of respondents as the most helpful elements of their counselling experience, and by even higher proportions who indicated that their expectations of sorting out thoughts and feelings or gaining support and understanding had been met.

Consistent with other counselling studies (Hunt 1985; Brannen and Collard 1982; Gaunt 1985) men were more likely than women to criticize counselling for its failure to offer concrete advice and strategies. Women more than men appeared to see value in just talking and clarifying feelings. Perhaps, as Brannen and Collard suggest, this reflects their more general comfort with self-disclosure.

Perhaps the provision of clear explanations of the counselling process and what it can and cannot do would be useful to ensure that clients do not retain unrealistic expectations of what counselling can achieve. This may avert unnecessary feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction with the counselling experience.

'When I first attended counselling I assumed a magical formula would be waved and everything would be OK. Unfortunately this is not true and I don't think this possibility is ever really stressed.' (Woman separated)

Hunt (1985) suggests that an agreement or contract be established with clients at the first session which sets out the focus of counselling and likely number of sessions. Redefinition of the focus and goals would be necessary as counselling progresses. The following comment supports this view.

'It needed to be a little more goal-focused. I realised we were unsure where we wanted to head and perhaps needed some mutual goal setting and counsellor direction.' (Female, separated)

Gaunt (1985) and Nixon (1988) reviewed a number of studies which suggest that intake procedures clarifying client expectations and the counselling process may lead to reduced numbers of inappropriate early termination of counselling. In Gaunt's study of initial interviews, clients who were more likely to return for more than one session perceived their counsellors to be more understanding of their situation and to have focused on specific issues than those who dropped out after the first session.

Most counsellors would state that they do negotiate an agreement of some kind at the start of counselling. Clearly, for some clients, an explicit and more structured framework would have been preferred. It appears necessary for counsellors to be trained to assess clients accurately, and to have a repertoire of intervention styles that can be fitted to diverse client needs.

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PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE COUNSELLING SERVICES

Respondents were asked their views about several aspects of the marriage counselling service they attended. The provision of service at appropriate times is an important aspect of any evaluation.

Appointments

A proportion of respondents (12 per cent of women and 9 per cent of men) had difficulties obtaining a first appointment (The comments that follow were given by women respondents.)

'A delay of 4 to 5 weeks for first appointment. An earlier appointment would have been more desirable.'

'The first appointment is crucial and it is very traumatic having to wait for weeks for help.'

There is no way of determining whether available first-time appointments were inconvenient for respondents or whether there were no appointments available during this time. However, availability of on-going appointments was a problem for 20 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women.

'Appointment availability needs to be more flexible. This is part of the reason we stopped going, it was difficult to get to due to our work commitments.'

'Counselling would have been more helpful if appointments had been available at more suitable times.'

With a majority of both men and women in the workforce, it would seem likely that evening or weekend appointments would be convenient for many potential clients. A number of agencies report waiting lists for their evening hours. The Marriage Guidance Council of the Northern Territory began Saturday morning sessions in 1989.

'After hours counselling because it is hard to get time off work to attend.'

'It should be available in the city and on weekends for workers.'

Some employers allow employees leave from work to attend counselling as part of their Employee Assistance Programs, an idea that perhaps could be expanded to more workplace situations.

Support for inconvenient appointment hours as a barrier to accessibility was found in a small study (30 clients) investigating reasons for client failure to keep initial intake appointments at one agency (Nixon 1988). Over one-third of clients who failed to keep an appointment indicated that inconvenient hours was a reason.

Accessibility

For some respondents (14 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men) distance from services was a problem, particularly in country areas.

'I would like to go again to marriage counselling, but now that I live in a country area there is no such service.'

'Having to drive long distance to attend sessions put stress on both parties.'

The Attorney-General's Department has recognized that a small number of towns and cities do not have a local branch of a marriage counselling agency; however it claims that over 90 per cent of the population lives within a reasonable distance of existing marriage counselling branches (Harvey 1983a)

Other Comments

A few people mentioned that childcare facilities would be useful and make attendance more feasible. Longer sessions would have been useful for some respondents.

'I think an hour isn't long enough always because you're just getting into the nitty-gritty when you are told to finish because the time is up.' (Female)

'Longer, more intense session would improve efficiency in reaching the cause of the problems.' (Male)

Costs

All agencies that charge fees use a sliding fee scale and insist that fees are negotiable according to financial circumstances. The issue of charging fees is controversial and has been discussed in Part One.

It is difficult to ascertain with accuracy the total cost of counselling for each respondent since some respondents who came as a couple paid as individuals and some together or fees may have varied if a partner came alone for some sessions and with a partner for others.

Costs Per Session

Approximately 10 per cent of women and 8 per cent of men did not pay anything for counselling, either because the agency they attended did not charge fees or their incomes were too low to merit payment.

Of the women, one-fifth paid an average of $20.00 per session with 71 per cent of all women paying $25.00 or less per session. For the men, 17 per cent paid either $20.00 or $30.00 per session with 75 per cent paying an average of $30.00 or less per session.

Overall Costs

The total cost of counselling would depend on the number of interviews respondents had. If we include the number of men and women who did not pay anything for counselling received, approximately 40 per cent of women and 31 per cent of men paid a total of less than $50 for counselling; 22 per cent of men and women paid between $51–$100; 25 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women paid between $101–$200, 10 per cent of men and women between $200–$300 and 11 per cent of men and 7 per cent of women paid between $301–$500. For 3 per cent of men and 1 per cent of women in this sample, counselling cost over $500.

Approximately 20 per cent of men and women listed costs as a problem. In response to a separate question about reasons for finishing counselling when they did, 10 per cent of women and men stated that 'it cost too much' as the reason for discontinuing counselling.

It was mainly women who wrote in comments on this aspect, perhaps a reflection on their financial position in terms of earned income or dependence on their spouse to pay the fees.

'I would have liked to continue but for the costs involved.'

'I am really disappointed that we had to stop going because of that fee, it could have made a difference.'

'Considering the importance of counselling, it would help if charges were deductible or claimable on health insurance.'

'Young families are often struggling to make ends meet and counselling fees may add to tension or make counselling less desirable.'

Costs created difficulty in some cases where one partner was resistant to counselling and used the fee as an obstacle to continuing counselling.

'I would have continued certainly if the cost for sessions was less than $5.00 as my spouse disagreed with counselling and I had to find the money out of housekeeping.'

The symbolism of paying for a service has been noted in previous research (Herron and Sitkowski 1986). Payment of a fee can be considered a way of equalizing the relationship between the professional and client or engendering a sense of reciprocity rather than charity given. The willingness to pay for marriage counselling has been equated with client motivation or value placed on the relationship by the partners and the necessity of demonstrating this linkage to clients. Conversely, the argument is made that marriage counselling is an essential social welfare service like medical care and should be freely available to all to use as necessary. A review of the literature related to the payment of fees in family therapy (Ogren 1989) found a lack of consistency in findings that payment of a fee for therapy affects continuation of treatment, duration of treatment, missed appointments or outcome.

One indicator of whether clients believed counselling to be a worthwhile experience is whether they would go to marriage counselling again if the need arose. Overall 63 per cent of men and women stated they would return to counselling if the need arose. There were no significant differences for the men or women who answered positively in terms of whether they were together or apart at the time of the follow-up.

Although only 63 per cent of men and women stated they would return to counselling if the need arose, over 80 per cent of men and women would recommend counselling to others. Again the status of their relationship was not significant in this response, although fewer of the men who separated during counselling would recommend counselling to others.

PART FOUR

COST BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

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COST BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

The study brief did not require us to measure the cost effectiveness of marriage counselling services provided by the approved agencies in comparison with other counselling and family support services in the community. However, the study design incorporates components that enable some assessment of direct and indirect cost savings to the community to be made.

Preventing Marriage Breakdown

The provision of marriage counselling through government subsidisation of marriage counselling organisations is considered to be one means of reducing the cost to government of marriage breakdown. An assumption is made that if couples can be assisted in reconciliation or conciliation through counselling they will be less likely to have recourse to legal costs associated with the Family Court of Australia and Legal Aid. In addition, couples with children who are assisted to remain together rather than separate will reduce the number of parents requiring Supporting Parents Benefits. In terms of the *Family Law Act*'s reference to marriage counselling, these outcomes relate to, 'counselling of a person in relation to — (b) reconciliation of the parties to a marriage'.

Overall, 66 per cent (62) of men and 73 per cent (132) of women in the post-counselling sample, who came to counselling with the hope of remaining together and preventing the marriage from breaking down, were still together eight months after marriage counselling ended.

While there is no guarantee that these marriages will continue to remain intact, 77 per cent (90) of men and 73 per cent (216) of women who were in an intact relationship at this time stated that both they and their partners were committed to the relationship. When asked about the likelihood of separation taking place since coming to counselling, of those clients who had considered this a possibility, 64 per cent (58) of men and 58 per cent (124) of women who were in intact relationships indicated this was less likely now. Approximately 68 per cent of men and 64 per cent of women with children remained together after counselling, compared to 54 per cent of men and 50 per cent of women who did not have children who remained together. It is possible to assume, therefore, that these people will not need the services of the Family Court, Legal Aid or Supporting Parents Benefits.

Since marriage counselling is aimed at preventing either separation or at least some of the conflict associated with separation, some indication of its relative cost-effectiveness can be obtained by comparison with the actual costs emanating from divorce in Australia.

According to the Attorney-General's Department's 1987–88 Annual Report, the cost of the Family Court was $37 million excluding the cost of the Family Court of Western Australia and reimbursements to the states for family law related matters.

The total cost of Legal Aid was $88 878 000. It was estimated that 60 per cent of Legal Aid costs are associated with family law related situations. Family law costs of Legal Aid thus equal $53 326 000.

If we look at the cost of Supporting Parents Benefits as a component of costs to the community of marriage breakdown, the estimated annual cost in 1988 was $1.9 billion including those receiving relevant Widow's Pensions (Department of Social Security 1988).

It could be argued that marriage counselling with its dual role of assisting couples to remain together, or separate with the least amount of stress, reduces the cost to government of marriage breakdown. Couples who remain together will not be using the Family Court or Legal Aid, and those with children will not be in need of Supporting Parents Benefit. Where couples have been assisted through the separation process it is hoped, with less conflict and more time spent resolving areas of contention, that they are less likely to be involved in lengthy legal proceedings within the Family Court.

Since 1979 there have been several attempts to estimate the savings to government as a result of the use of marriage counselling services (Harvey 1979; Crawley 1987; Hartin 1988, Eastman 1989). Based on results of the AIFS study, a crude estimate can be made of cost savings related to Family Court, Legal Aid, and Supporting Parents Benefits. This estimate is crude because there may be other costs that could be included in the calculation. However, it should be borne in mind that these estimates are based on the current marriage counselling client population, so it is not possible to generalise about the potential cost savings if funding were increased.

As women are more likely to be the initiators of both counselling and separation, calculations are based on the number of women. Using only women avoids the possibility of double counting for couples. Women are also the major recipients of Supporting Parents Benefits.

The following argument is based on the assumption that the marriage counselling survey results are representative of marriage counselling results generally.

An estimate has been made of divorces averted and from this has been subtracted the number of divorces where counselling could be said to have contributed to the separation, leaving us with a net figure of marriages 'saved'.

Prior to counselling, respondents were asked what the chances were of their relationship ending in the next twelve months. Amongst those who remained together, we have taken fifty per cent of those who thought there was an 'about even' chance their relationship would end, plus all those who felt there was a high or very high chance of separation. It could be said of this group that, as they have remained together, divorce has been averted as a result of counselling.

Conversely, amongst those who were together at the start of counselling but have since separated, we have taken 50 per cent of those who felt there was a 50/50 chance of separation and all those who believed there was a low chance initially that they would separate. It could be said of this group that, as they have separated but had not expected to initially, counselling contributed to their separation.

Using this approach, it is estimated that in 25 per cent of all marriage counselling cases divorce was averted, and in six per cent of cases divorce was 'caused', leaving a net saving of 19 per cent. Nineteen per cent of all cases would mean that marriage counselling subsequently averts a net 4111 divorces annually.

On the basis of these figures, if the total cost of the Family Court is $37000000 and there are 40000 divorces annually, the estimated Family Court costs of divorce are $925 per divorce. If marriage counselling prevents an estimated 4111 divorces on the basis of the argument presented here, then the cost saving to the Family Courts would be in the vicinity of $3.8 million.

It is estimated that 60 per cent of Legal Aids costs are associated with family law related situations. In 1987–88 this amounted to $53.3 million. Institute of Family Studies research on divorce (McDonald 1986) suggests that 46 per cent of young women with children use Legal Aid. As there were approximately 40000 divorces, the estimated cost of legal aid spread across all divorces is $799.50 per divorce. This means that the estimated savings on legal aid costs as a result of marriage counselling would be $3.3 million.

The savings estimated for the Family Court and Legal Aid could be criticised on the basis that average costs are used rather than marginal costs; that is, a 10 per cent drop in the number of divorces may not lead to a 10 per cent drop in the costs of these services because of the fixed infrastructure costs involved. For these services, however, the difference between average and marginal costs is likely to be small.

The major cost of marital breakdown is Supporting Parents Benefit, provided to a separated parent with at least one dependent child under 16 years of age, who is caring for children with minimum or no financial assistance from a partner. The cost to government for Supporting Parent Benefits as a result of relationship breakdown is estimated to be $1.9 billion. In this study, 80 per cent of women had children, and according to other

AIFS sources (McDonald 1986) 70 per cent of women at some stage during marital breakdown go on Supporting Parents Benefit. According to the Department of Social Security, the average weekly payment of Supporting Parent Benefit is $169, and the average length of time on Supporting Parent Benefits is 24 months. On the basis of these figures, it is thus estimated that the savings to government on Supporting Parent Benefits as a result of marriage counselling will be approximately $40.4 million.

Therefore, combining the estimated savings on Family Law costs, Legal Aid and Supporting Parent Benefit, it could be estimated that marriage counselling saves government around $47.5 million annually. As stated earlier, this estimation does not necessarily imply that a doubling of government expenditure on marriage counselling would lead to a doubling of these savings because the population using the additional marriage counselling services may not behave in the same way as those currently using these services.

There are also indirect cost-benefits that arise from marriage counselling. These benefits are not easily quantified as they are more subjective than objective in interpretation. In general, indirect benefits are associated with the objectives and potential of marriage counselling to improve the quality of the marital relationship. This may result in reduced levels of tension, frustration, and conflict that, if not moderated, could lead to marital breakdown and consequent recourse to the Family Court and Legal Aid.

Regardless of outcome, counselling assisted clients in acquiring interpersonal skills such as improved communication and handling of conflict. Respondents gained insight into themselves, their partner and the relationship that had contributed to the problem. Men and women obtained emotional support and women particularly improved in self-esteem. Counselling is often defined in terms of these therapeutic and facilitative outcomes as stated in the operational definition of marriage counselling in use by the Attorney-General's Department.

For the majority of respondents who remained together and were assisted by counselling to enhance their relationship, to improve their parenting skills, to learn how to handle conflicts, and to become more realistic in their expectations of their relationship, it is possible to presume or speculate that such gains prevented escalation of problems and deterioration in the relationship. As one client put it:

> *'It helped me to understand myself better, helped me to learn ways of dealing with anger and expressing it. Helped me and my spouse find better ways to communicate and also raise our child.'* (Female in intact relationship)

Counselling that enables couples to communicate more effectively, to handle conflict, anger, and aggression, to improve their parenting skills, to increase their self-esteem and to understand the consequences of their actions may lead to a reduction in:

- instances of domestic violence
- child neglect or abuse

- excessive use of drugs or alcohol
- stress related accidents and illness
- absenteeism and lower work productivity

Assisting With the Separation Process

Given that marital disruption is considered to be among the most stressful of life events (Holmes and Rahe 1967, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners 1983), assisting people to cope with the consequences of marital breakdown should be an essential government concern.

Almost half of separated men and two-thirds of separated women in the sample indicated they had changed personally for the better and 45 per cent of separated men had received some assistance with the separation process compared to 59 per cent of women. Approximately one-third of separated men and half of separated women stated their problems were at least somewhat better since counselling. For 30 per cent of separated women and 25 per cent of men, the relationship between them had changed for the better as a result of counselling.

In relation to the Act, marriage counselling appears less effective in assisting clients with 'adjusting to the dissolution of a marriage'. It is perceived as less helpful in situations where breakdown occurs, particularly for men who do not want the separation.

For these separated men and women whom counselling *did* assist there are benefits, but these are not easily quantified. For couples who do separate and divorce, counselling may enable former partners to remain responsible and involved parents, thus ensuring children benefit from the advantages of having an on-going relationship with both parents.

Counselling that enables couples to understand the processes of marriage breakdown may enable each partner to form and maintain a satisfying future relationship, as this comment illustrates:

'It helped me to realise where I went wrong in my marriage so hopefully it won't happen again.' (Male, separated)

From the cost-benefit perspective, individuals who have been to counselling may, even if they do have recourse to legal and other services, use them more appropriately and effectively.

PART FIVE

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

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CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of marriage counselling. An important component of the analysis was to distinguish between those clients who benefited and who were satisfied with the counselling they received and those who were dissatisfied and did not feel counselling assisted them. Effectiveness in this study was determined by the following outcomes:

- change in relationship status
- change in level of commitment to the relationship
- satisfaction with counselling
- improvement in problem area, personal wellbeing and viability of the relationship
- viability of the relationship

How clients judge the counselling experience will be affected by their expectations of what they want to happen or do about their relationship and by what they expect counselling can achieve.

The majority of marriage counselling clients who participated in the study came to counselling with the expectation or hope that marriage counselling could improve the relationship and prevent its breakdown. A significant minority of clients, particularly women,approached counselling to make decisions about separation or for assistance in coping with the consequences of separation.

Clients also looked to counselling to gain insight into what was happening to their relationship, to obtain emotional support and to acquire skills to enhance their personal lives and their relationships.

Women were more likely to approach counselling and to encourage their partners to attend. Analysis demonstrated that women also had lower self esteem, satisfaction with life, marital satisfaction and were less committed or optimistic about the future of their relationship when they commenced counselling. This general dissatisfaction is no doubt the reason they initiate counselling. Women also had higher expectations of counselling for themselves individually and for their relationship than their partners did.

If we look at the changes in relationship status approximately eight months after the commencement of counselling, of those who were together at the start of counselling, 81% of men and 78% of women remained together and 19% of men and 22% of women had separated since counselling. Of those who were separated 11% of men and 30% of women had reconciled since counselling. One-quarter of men and almost one-third of women were more optimistic about their relationship continuing since they had attended counselling.

Satisfaction was significantly related to the status of the relationship, particularly for men. Around 60% of men and women who were living with their partner post-counselling and separated women were satisfied with the results of counselling in contrast to only 41% of separated men who were pleased with the outcome. Similarly, over two-thirds of men and women in intact relationships and separated women were satisfied with the counselling they received compared to less than one-half of separated men.

Over 80 per cent of men and women were satisfied with the way they got along with their counsellor. Dissatisfaction was mainly expressed by men who had separated.

In terms of improvement and change for the better in the relationship, the same pattern emerges. While over one-half of men and women believed their relationship had changed for the better,less than one-third of those who had separated felt this way.

Overall, two-thirds of all men and women believed counselling had contributed to the resolution of problems. However, 55 per cent of separated women and 61% of separated men felt marriage counselling did not contribute at all to resolving their problems.

Marital consensus scores significantly increased for men more than women, as did marital satisfaction for men and women who remained together or had been reconciled. Separated women significantly improved in self-esteem and wellbeing and were more likely to report that their life after separation was better in relation to their social life, parenting and career than separated men. These post-counselling improvements were significantly related to counselling effectiveness.

Since counselling is mainly concerned with the relationship, if we consider the couple perspective over half of men and women still together reported that both partners had changed for the better, compared to one-fifth of men and one-quarter of women who were separated. Where we had the opinions of both partners, in two-thirds of cases both partners were satisfied with what had happened to the relationship and more than half believed both partners had changed for the better.

Remaining in the relationship was the best predictor for determining the effectiveness of counselling in improving the relationship between men and women. For men, having children was another factor. For women, factors such as initial marital satisfaction and optimism about the future of the relationship, attending more counselling sessions, shorter duration of relationship, and the expectation of acquiring skills were also positive predictors.

The best predictor of counselling effectiveness in assisting men personally was remaining in the relationship. This was not true for women. For women, initiating counselling and attending more sessions were important. For both men and women, being positive about the relationship when they came to counselling was a predictor of individual effectiveness.

Counselling thus appears to be highly effective for the majority of clients who come to improve their relationship or manage to prevent breakdown. It is less effective in dealing in situations where breakdown occurs, particularly for men who do not want the separation. This suggests that counselling is more effective with those who have less severe relationship problems.

The helpfulness and benefits of counselling most frequently mentioned were acquiring skills in communication and handling conflicts, gaining insight into themselves, their partner and the dynamics of the relationship that had contributed to the problems, and obtaining emotional support, increased self-esteem and coping skills, (particularly for women), and a sympathetic neutral person to talk to. The process of counselling is often defined in terms of these therapeutic and facilitative outcomes.

Counselling was perceived as assisting clients individually as separate from the relationship, particularly for women. Men who separated since the start of counselling were the least satisfied with their lives as a whole whereas women gained more in self-esteem and appeared more able to be assisted in coping with the process of separation. Nevertheless, almost half of separated men and two-thirds of separated women did indicate they had changed personally for the better and over two-fifths of separated men had received some assistance with the separation process, compared to more than half of women.

Since women more than men were dissatisfied with personal areas of their lives when they came to counselling, it is not surprising that there were greater opportunities for them to feel personally assisted by counselling. While both men and women who remained in their relationships improved their levels of marital satisfaction and consensus, men were still more contented with their relationship than their partners after counselling.

Women may also be more familiar and comfortable with what the counselling process involves. Women more than men appear to see value in just talking and clarifying feelings, which may reflect their more general comfort with self-disclosure. Men, on the other hand, see benefit mostly in finding solutions which they deem satisfactory.

These findings highlight the 'his and her' experiences of marriage and counselling. Although women appear more dissatisfied with their relationship, they are also more inclined to initiate counselling in order to confront the issues and make decisions. This may reflect not only the impact of counselling, but the wider social changes and reappraisals regarding expectations of men's and women's roles and the external rules governing the institution of marriage and its dissolution.

The emphasis on the interpersonal or emotional and affective aspects of the relationship support the theory that the companionate components of marriage are more salient than environmental factors in decisions about maintaining relationships.

The study highlights the importance of publicizing the message that seeking help for marital and relationship problems is a positive action, not a sign of failure or dysfunction as an individual. It should be seen as an opportunity to increase understanding and acquire skills to improve a relationship or to cope with the consequences of breakdown.

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IMPLICATIONS

As marital disruption is considered to be among the most stressful of life events (Holmes and Rahe 1967; Royal Australian College of General Practitioners 1983), assisting people to find ways of resolving marital dysfunction and stress to achieve more satisfying relationships or to cope with the consequences of marital breakdown should be an essential government concern.

To achieve this task is not easy and requires the provision of a range of marriage and family support services along a continuum of educational, preventative and remedial interventions. These interventions must be targetted to men and women at various points in the life cycle — at the time of pre-marital involvement, in the early stages of cohabitation, at the birth of a child, during the years of raising adolescents, during a crisis phase of illness or unemployment, or when a couple is confronting the retirement years.

Given the association of self-esteem with the ability to form satisfying relationships, these interventions may begin with the provision of parenting education that encourages the development of self-esteem in the family setting. It is critical to include human relationships education in the schools, to provide skills in communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution which will prepare men and women for mature relationships as partners, parents and community members.

Provision of services must also encompass community education and training of other professionals who work with families.

Since supports for marriage and family life are difficult to contain in a narrow definition of marriage counselling or marriage education, it is necessary to consider again the questions raised earlier by the AIFS in its review of marriage counselling policies (Wolcott 1984). 'What should marriage counselling be trying to do? and 'Who should have jurisdiction over the provision of marriage counselling services?'

Implications for Government Departments

Current Government Policy Towards Provision of Marriage Counselling

In 1989–90, the Attorney-General's Department provided $7.6 million to subsidise the work of marriage counselling agencies throughout Australia (see Table 1). Department policy, confirmed in 1988 (Fox 1988), is to fund only up to 75 per cent of an approved organization's marriage counselling expenditure and to encourage agencies to raise 25 per cent of expenditures from fees. However no client is to be denied services because of an inability to pay a fee.

The Attorney-General's Department has also been concerned that marriage counselling be distinguished from health and welfare or individual psychotherapy which is funded by other State or Federal Health and Welfare Departments.

Coordination

In respect to government, the AIFS repeats its previous recommendation that greater coordination of policies related to the provision of marriage and family support services is essential to assure availability and accessibility to a range of services. Coordination is necessary to ensure that there is a minimum of duplication and competition for scarce resources and to ensure adequate distribution of resources and services across all communities.

Since the provision of marriage and family supports crosses government departments of health, education, community services and the law, greater consideration needs to be given to how better coordination can be achieved across both State/Federal and departmental boundaries.

Innovative approaches to providing supports for marriage and family life along the continuum from pre-marriage to post-divorce need to be developed. The recent inclusion of family mediation and youth mediation as activities funded by the Attorney-General is an example of this broader approach. Coordination would enable a national approach to promoting services and programs.

Clarification of Aims

Closely related to aspects of coordination, clarification of the aims and goals of marriage counselling as provided by the approved agencies is required if the agencies are to remain organised and funded along current lines. The type and scope of services that are allowed need to be clearly set out to eliminate confusion over what activities are to be encouraged and supported. This would enable an evaluation of whether government policies should be reconsidered or legislation amended to more effectively meet community needs.

Accessibility

Although only a few clients in the study commented that distance to an agency was a problem, the absence of approved agencies in rural or outer metropolitan areas could be an obstacle for potential users of the service. A look at a map pinpointing where current services are located indicates gaps in these areas that need to be considered.

Adequate provision of interpreters and outreach to ethnic communities would improve the accessibility of these populations.

Provision of marriage counselling services from a multi-service centre where other services such as parenting education, financial counselling, or even recreational programs are offered may improve accessibility in two ways. First, the stigma that may attach to attending a marriage counselling service may be reduced. Second, cost-savings on rental and ancillary administrative supports may be possible. Several agencies currently share accommodation with state, local or non-government agencies.

Scope of Service

Fee for service

The question of whether marriage counselling services should be offered free of charge, as are the services of the Family Court Counselling service, or costed on a sliding scale basis related to client income needs to be resolved.

Professional training

The complexity of marital and family dynamics demands a level of expertise in practitioners of marriage and family counselling which obviates reliance on poorly paid staff or volunteers.

Training and supervision of staff are essential adjuncts to provision of services. On-going evaluation of service effectiveness is also necessary. Adequate funding for these components is an important consideration if services are to be available at reasonable cost to clients.

Accountability

By approving and funding selected service providers of marriage counselling, the Attorney-General implies that such services meet standards the public can rely on. Any department that may be involved in provision of services must provide for and support on-going monitoring of the quality of funded services, the efficiency of their management, and the setting of standards to be met.

Implications for Marriage Counselling Agencies

In relation to the agencies, several recommendations are suggested by the study.

Referral

Because admitting to having a marital problem is still unacceptable to some people, marital distress may be disguised as something more acceptable such as a medical symptom, stress at work or difficulties with a child. Marital stress and conflict may also contribute to symptoms which bring people to seek medical attention. For this reason it is important to educate 'gate keepers' such as doctors, lawyers, infant welfare nurses, the police and personnel managers about the availability of counselling services and assist them in recognizing underlying marital problems and making appropriate referrals.

Liaison with ethnic community leaders and organizations is necessary to improve the potential for this population to use counselling services.

Outreach

Although studies have revealed that men who are separated could benefit from social services (Jordon 1988; Chadwick 1989), men do not seek or receive help as often as women. Since men appear to be less comfortable or motivated to attend counselling, information about marriage counselling in a format appealing to men should be available where men tend to gather, at sporting clubs, work centres, even pubs. For both men and women marriage counselling information should be accessible at work locations and in community venues such as child care centres, neighborhood houses and community social centres.

Since lower educated men and women appear to take less advantage of marriage counselling, information should be made available in a format attractive to this audience. One option is articles and advertisements in popular magazines and on radio or television programs, that appeal to a wide range of groups in the community.

Community forums and media programs on typical marital problems and strategies to resolve them should be considered. Community education is a priority. The myth persists that marriages are made in heaven and require no skills or preparation and should be able to be resolved in the privacy of the family. It is essential that the community understand that assistance with marital and family stress is not equated with failure, or that only the disadvantaged and 'real' problem families need to seek assistance.

Accessibility

Weekend and evening times for counselling are necessary if working men and women are to be able to take advantage of the services. It is not feasible to have sessions concentrated during working hours.

Clarification of Aims

Clear explanations of the counselling process and what it can and cannot do would be useful to ensure that clients do not retain unrealistic expectations of counselling. This may avert unnecessary feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction with the counselling experience.

Agencies providing marriage counselling must present a clear image to the community of their objectives — that counselling helps not only in 'mending' but also in 'ending' marriages (Hunt 1985). Increased training of counsellors in separation counselling, mediation and education may be required.

Because the study suggests that marriage counselling is personally beneficial to women, apart from any impact on the outcome of the relationship, counsellors and their agencies must clarify the objectives of the counselling offered. Referral for individual counselling may be appropriate at times. Since individual improvement may result from a focus on how a person relates to another in the context of relationships, the boundaries may be blurred between individual therapy and counselling which focus on relationships.

Approach

Some clients felt counselling had not been helpful because they were not given specific advice, guidance or concrete techniques to handle problems. For some individuals a more practical orientation rather than an emphasis on insight and clarification of feeling is desired. Increased emphasis on defined communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills is called for. Mediation has been recommended as a process than focuses on problem-solving techniques.

Although the general effectiveness of marriage counselling has been confirmed in this study, the need for innovative approaches and improved accessibility and availability is also clear. It is the responsibility of marriage counselling agencies and practitioners to focus on their methodology and explore interventions that will be most effective and productive with diverse clients. It is the responsibility of government to ensure that services are equitably available to all.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRES

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No.

MARRIAGE COUNSELLING SURVEY 1987

PART 1

1. Which statement below best describes the relationship you are currently in?
(Please tick only one box)

I am married and living together with my husband/wife 1

I am separated from my husband/wife and not in a new relationship 2

I am separated from my husband/wife and in a new relationship 3

I am living with someone but we are not married (de facto) 4

I am separated from my de facto partner and not in a new relationship 5

I am separated from my de facto partner and in a new relationship 6

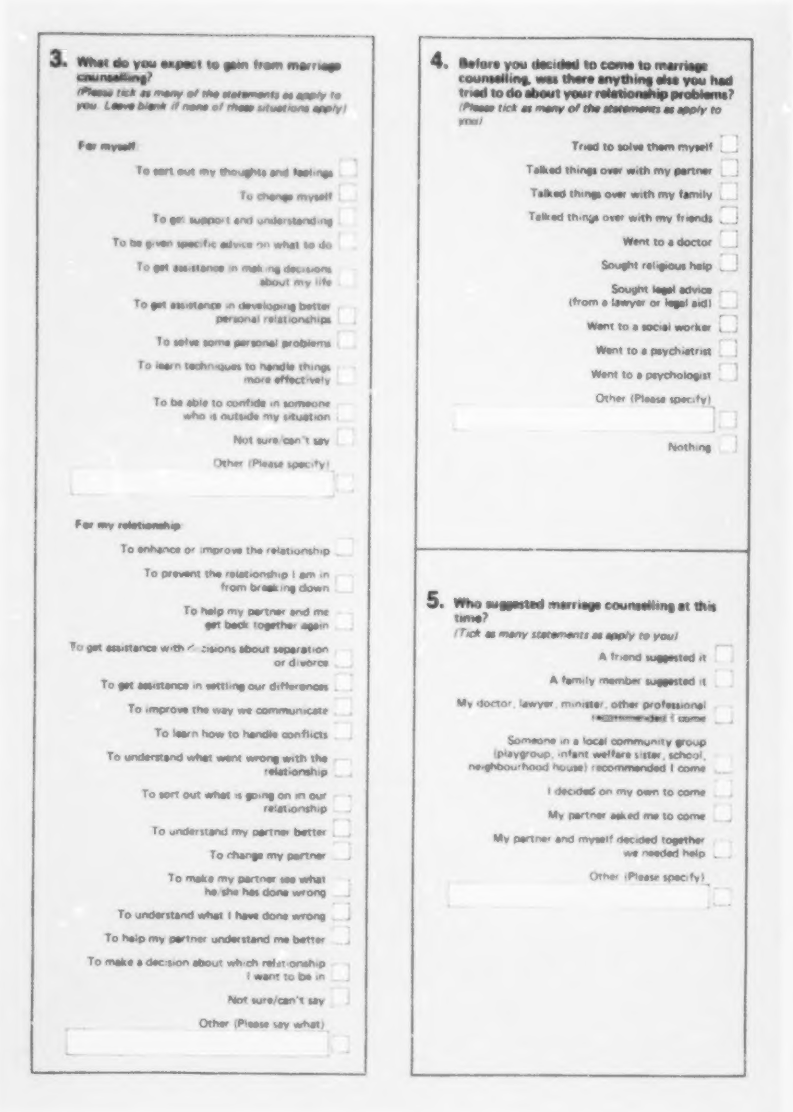
I have a relationship with someone but we are not living together 7

Other (Please specify) 8

2. I am trying to decide between two relationships that I am in.

Yes 1

No 2



3. What do you expect to gain from marriage counselling?
(Please tick as many of the statements as apply to you. Leave blank if none of these situations apply)

For myself:

To sort out my thoughts and feelings ☐
To change myself ☐
To get support and understanding ☐
To be given specific advice on what to do ☐
To get assistance in making decisions about my life ☐
To get assistance in developing better personal relationships ☐
To solve some personal problems ☐
To learn techniques to handle things more effectively ☐
To be able to confide in someone who is outside my situation ☐
Not sure/can't say ☐
Other (Please specify) ☐

For my relationship:

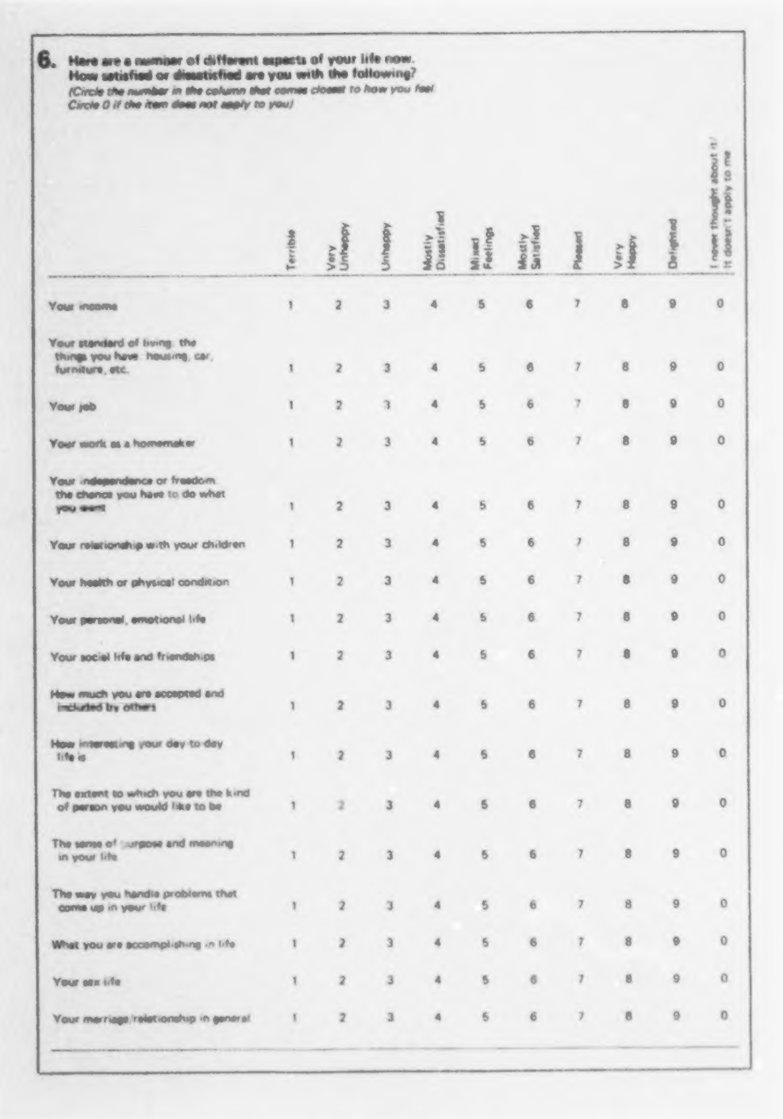
To enhance or improve the relationship ☐
To prevent the relationship I am in from breaking down ☐
To help my partner and me get back together again ☐
To get assistance with decisions about separation or divorce ☐
To get assistance in settling our differences ☐
To improve the way we communicate ☐
To learn how to handle conflicts ☐
To understand what went wrong with the relationship ☐
To sort out what is going on in our relationship ☐
To understand my partner better ☐
To change my partner ☐
To make my partner see what he/she has done wrong ☐
To understand what I have done wrong ☐
To help my partner understand me better ☐
To make a decision about which relationship I want to be in ☐
Not sure/can't say ☐
Other (Please say what) ☐

4. Before you decided to come to marriage counselling, was there anything else you had tried to do about your relationship problems?
(Please tick as many of the statements as apply to you)

Tried to solve them myself ☐
Talked things over with my partner ☐
Talked things over with my family ☐
Talked things over with my friends ☐
Went to a doctor ☐
Sought religious help ☐
Sought legal advice (from a lawyer or legal aid) ☐
Went to a social worker ☐
Went to a psychiatrist ☐
Went to a psychologist ☐
Other (Please specify) ☐
Nothing ☐

5. Who suggested marriage counselling at this time?
(Tick as many statements as apply to you)

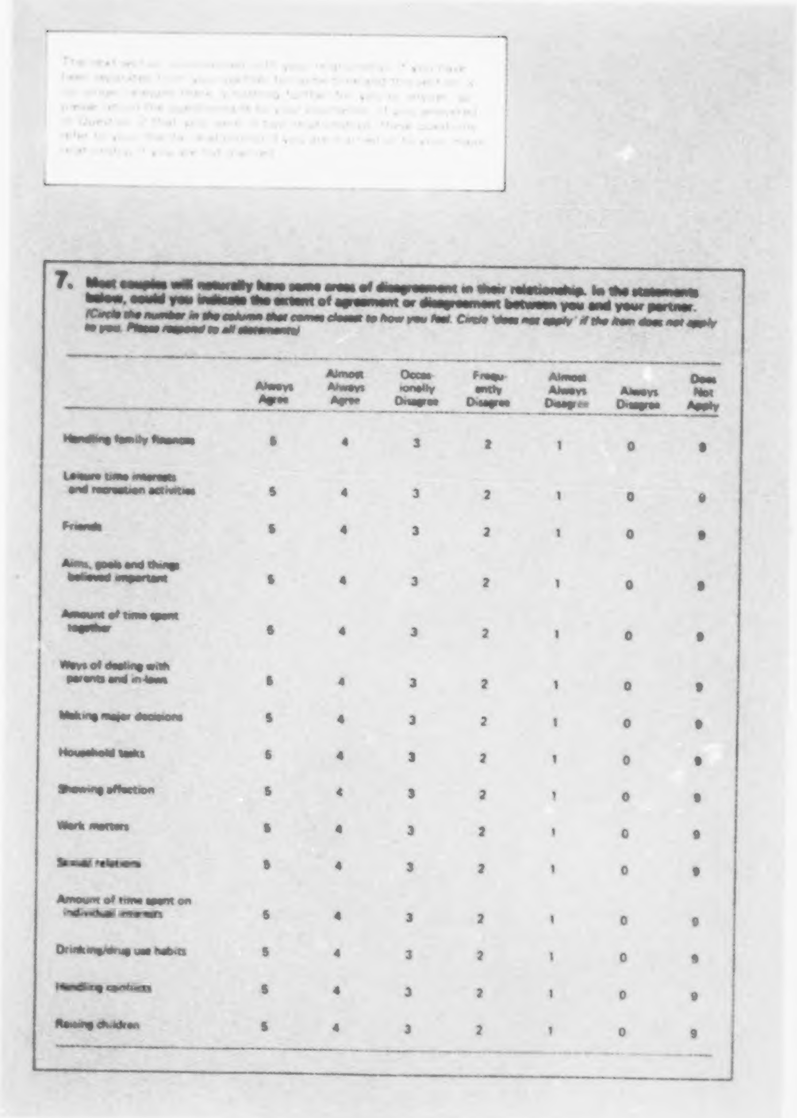
A friend suggested it ☐
A family member suggested it ☐
My doctor, lawyer, minister, other professional recommended I come ☐
Someone in a local community group (playgroup, infant welfare sister, school, neighbourhood house) recommended I come ☐
I decided on my own to come ☐
My partner asked me to come ☐
My partner and myself decided together we needed help ☐
Other (Please specify) ☐



6. Here are a number of different aspects of your life now. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?

(Circle the number in the column that comes closest to how you feel. Circle 0 if the item does not apply to you)

	Terrible	Very Unhappy	Unhappy	Mostly Dissatisfied	Mixed Feelings	Mostly Satisfied	Pleased	Very Happy	Delighted	I never thought about it/ It doesn't apply to me
Your income	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your standard of living: the things you have: housing, car, furniture, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your work as a homemaker	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your independence or freedom: the chance you have to do what you want	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your relationship with your children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your health or physical condition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your personal, emotional life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your social life and friendships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
How much you are accepted and included by others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
How interesting your day-to-day life is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
The extent to which you are the kind of person you would like to be	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
The sense of purpose and meaning in your life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
The way you handle problems that come up in your life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
What you are accomplishing in life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your sex life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your marriage/relationship in general	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0



7. Most couples will naturally have some areas of disagreement in their relationship. In the statements below, could you indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner.
(Circle the number in the column that comes closest to how you feel. Circle 'does not apply' if the item does not apply to you. Please respond to all statements)

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree	Does Not Apply
Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Leisure time interests and recreation activities	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Aims, goals and things believed important	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Ways of dealing with parents and in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Making major decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Household tasks	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Showing affection	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Work matters	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Sexual relations	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Amount of time spent on individual interests	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Drinking/drug use habits	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Handling conflicts	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Raising children	5	4	3	2	1	0	9

8. **Now, using this same list, place the number 1 next to the most important area of disagreement and the numbers 2 and 3 to the next most important areas.**
(Just tick 3 items)

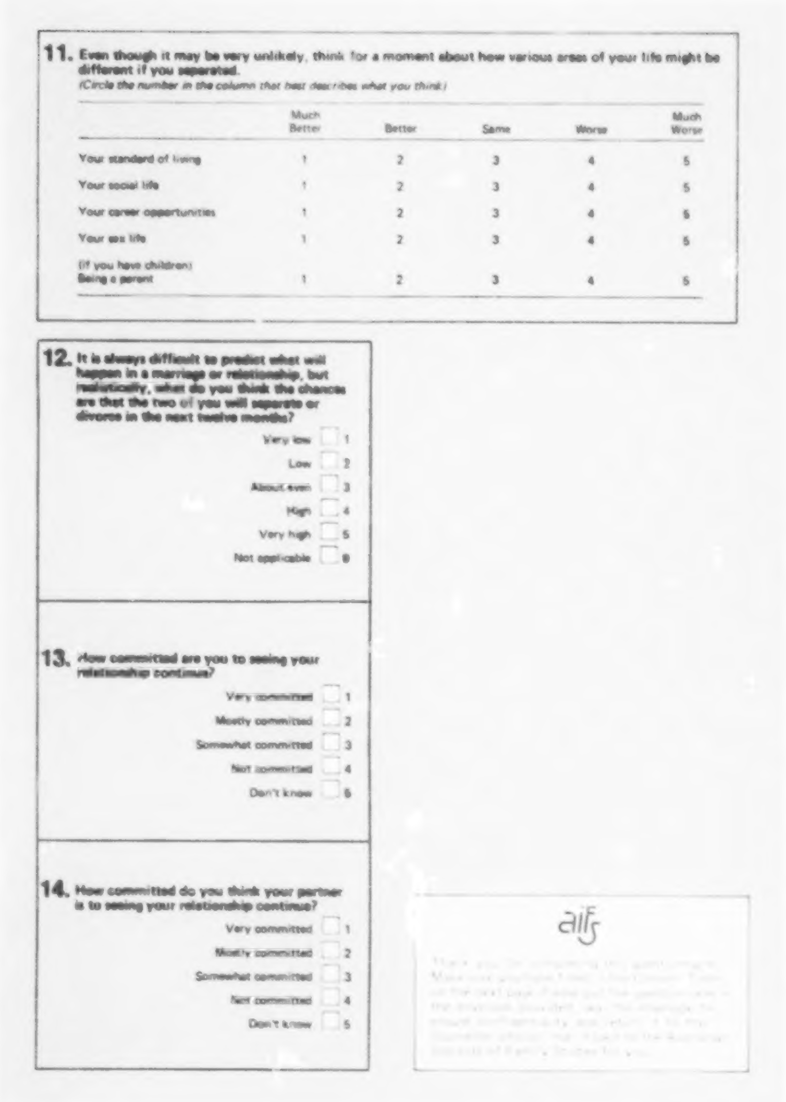
Handling family finances ☐
Leisure time interests and recreation activities ☐
Friends ☐
Aims, goals and things believed important ☐
Amount of time spent together ☐
Ways of dealing with parents and in-laws ☐
Making major decisions ☐
Household tasks ☐
Showing affection ☐
Work matters ☐
Sexual relations ☐
Amount of time spent on individual interests ☐
Drinking/drug use habits ☐
Handling conflicts ☐
Raising children ☐

9. **There are various ways couples deal with serious disagreements. When you have a serious disagreement with your partner, how often do you do the following?**
(Please circle the number in the column which best describes your situation)

	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never	Does Not Apply
Just let it pass, don't let it bother you	4	3	2	1	9
Discuss your disagreements calmly	4	3	2	1	9
Argue heatedly or shout at each other	4	3	2	1	9
End up hitting or throwing things at each other	4	3	2	1	9
Turn on the cold shoulder treatment	4	3	2	1	9

10. **During the past year, have you or your partner discussed the idea of separating?**

Yes, I brought it up the first time	☐	1
Yes, my partner brought it up the first time	☐	2
No	☐	3
Not applicable	☐	9



11. **Even though it may be very unlikely, think for a moment about how various areas of your life might be different if you separated.**
(Circle the number in the column that best describes what you think)

	Much Better	Better	Same	Worse	Much Worse
Your standard of living	1	2	3	4	5
Your social life	1	2	3	4	5
Your career opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Your sex life	1	2	3	4	5
(If you have children) Being a parent	1	2	3	4	5

12. **It is always difficult to predict what will happen in a marriage or relationship, but realistically, what do you think the chances are that the two of you will separate or divorce in the next twelve months?**

Very low ☐ 1
Low ☐ 2
About even ☐ 3
High ☐ 4
Very high ☐ 5
Not applicable ☐ 8

13. **How committed are you to seeing your relationship continue?**

Very committed ☐ 1
Mostly committed ☐ 2
Somewhat committed ☐ 3
Not committed ☐ 4
Don't know ☐ 5

14. **How committed do you think your partner is to seeing your relationship continue?**

Very committed ☐ 1
Mostly committed ☐ 2
Somewhat committed ☐ 3
Not committed ☐ 4
Don't know ☐ 5

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire. [illegible] on the next page [illegible] the questionnaire in the envelope provided, seal the envelope to ensure confidentiality and return it to the counsellor [illegible] back to the Australian Institute of Family Studies for you.

CONFIDENTIAL

A.I.F.S. No.: ☐

aifs Australian Institute of Family Studies

MARRIAGE COUNSELLING SURVEY
1988
PART 2

Thank you again for agreeing to take part in the Australian Institute of Family Studies survey.

[illegible]

[illegible]

Thinking back to when you first came to counselling in October or November 1987, we would like to ask you some questions about the relationship you came to counselling about.

1. **How long had the relationship been going when you first came to counselling?**

years ______ months ______

2. **Had you ever been seperated in that relationship?**

Before you first came to counselling

Yes ☐ 1

No ☐ 2

During counselling

Yes ☐ 1

No ☐ 2

3. **In that relationship, when you first came to counselling were you?**

Living together ☐ 1

Living apart ☐ 2

4. **Still thinking about that same relationship, are you now?**

Living together ☐ 1

Living apart ☐ 2

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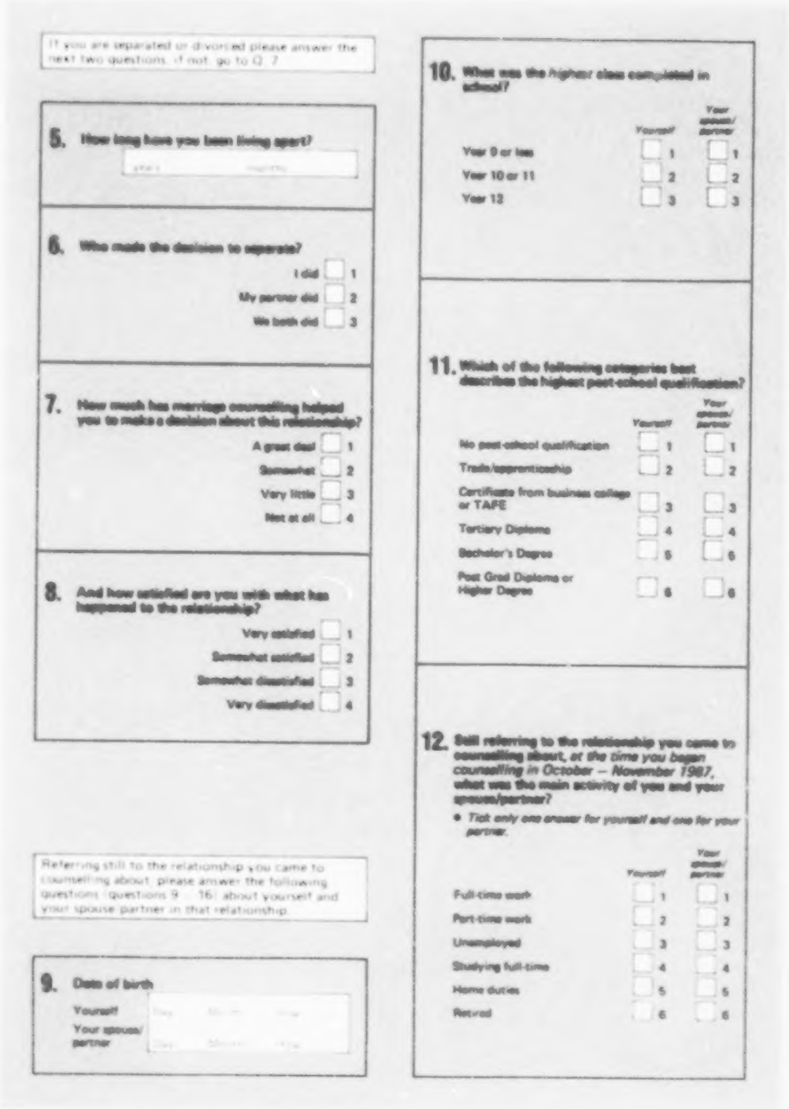


If you are separated or divorced please answer the next two questions, if not, go to Q. 7

5. **How long have you been living apart?**

years months

6. **Who made the decision to separate?**

I did	☐	1
My partner did	☐	2
We both did	☐	3

7. **How much has marriage counselling helped you to make a decision about this relationship?**

A great deal	☐	1
Somewhat	☐	2
Very little	☐	3
Not at all	☐	4

8. **And how satisfied are you with what has happened to the relationship?**

Very satisfied	☐	1
Somewhat satisfied	☐	2
Somewhat dissatisfied	☐	3
Very dissatisfied	☐	4

Referring still to the relationship you came to counselling about, please answer the following questions (questions 9 – 16) about yourself and your spouse partner in that relationship.

9. **Date of birth**

Yourself Day Month Year

Your spouse/partner Day Month Year

10. **What was the *highest* class completed in school?**

	Yourself	Your spouse/ partner
Year 9 or less	☐ 1	☐ 1
Year 10 or 11	☐ 2	☐ 2
Year 12	☐ 3	☐ 3

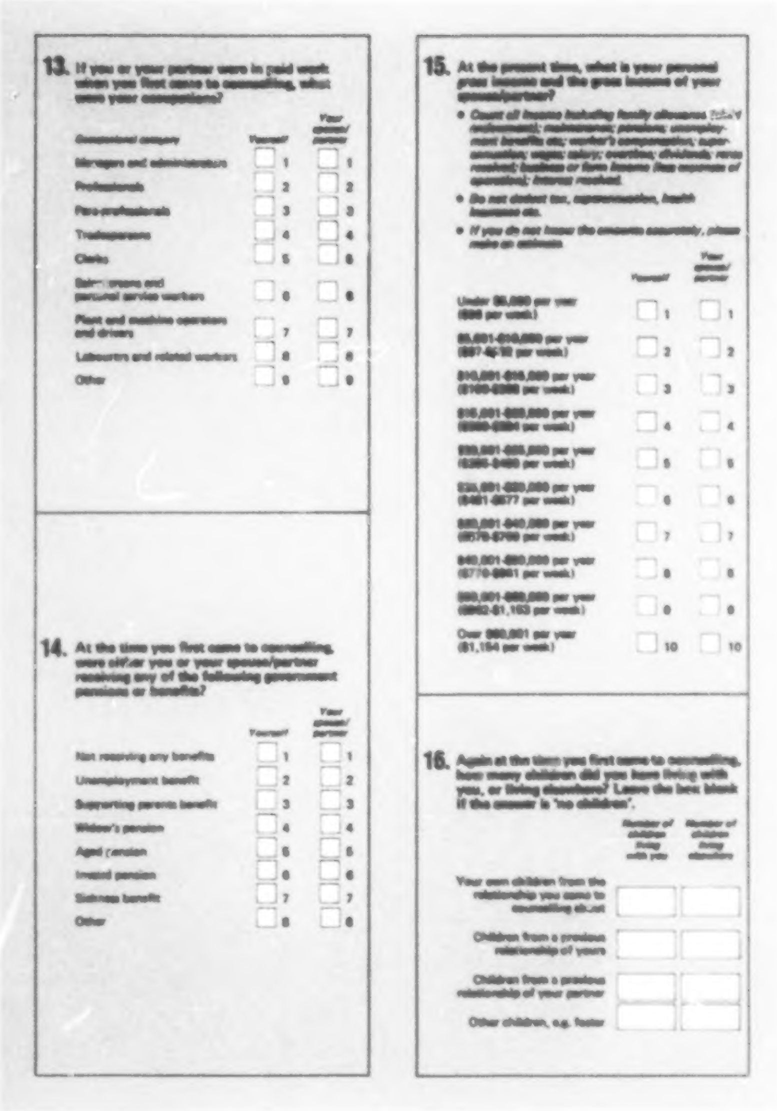
11. **Which of the following categories best describes the highest post-school qualification?**

	Yourself	Your spouse/ partner
No post-school qualification	☐ 1	☐ 1
Trade/apprenticeship	☐ 2	☐ 2
Certificate from business college or TAFE	☐ 3	☐ 3
Tertiary Diploma	☐ 4	☐ 4
Bachelor's Degree	☐ 5	☐ 5
Post Grad Diploma or Higher Degree	☐ 6	☐ 6

12. **Still referring to the relationship you came to counselling about, *at the time you began counselling in October – November 1987*, what was the main activity of you and your spouse/partner?**

- *Tick only one answer for yourself and one for your partner.*

	Yourself	Your spouse/ partner
Full-time work	☐ 1	☐ 1
Part-time work	☐ 2	☐ 2
Unemployed	☐ 3	☐ 3
Studying full-time	☐ 4	☐ 4
Home duties	☐ 5	☐ 5
Retired	☐ 6	☐ 6



13. **If you or your partner were in paid work when you first came to counselling, what were your occupations?**

Occupational category	*Yourself*		*Your spouse/partner*	
Managers and administrators	☐	1	☐	1
Professionals	☐	2	☐	2
Para-professionals	☐	3	☐	3
Tradespersons	☐	4	☐	4
Clerks	☐	5	☐	5
Salespersons and personal service workers	☐	6	☐	6
Plant and machine operators and drivers	☐	7	☐	7
Labourers and related workers	☐	8	☐	8
Other	☐	9	☐	9

14. **At the time you first came to counselling, were either you or your spouse/partner receiving any of the following government pensions or benefits?**

	Yourself		*Your spouse/partner*	
Not receiving any benefits	☐	1	☐	1
Unemployment benefit	☐	2	☐	2
Supporting parents benefit	☐	3	☐	3
Widow's pension	☐	4	☐	4
Aged pension	☐	5	☐	5
Invalid pension	☐	6	☐	6
Sickness benefit	☐	7	☐	7
Other	☐	8	☐	8

15. **At the present time, what is your personal gross income and the gross income of your spouse/partner?**

- *Count all income including family allowance (family endowment); maintenance; pensions; unemployment benefits etc; worker's compensation; superannuation; wages; salary; overtime; dividends; rents received; business or farm income (less expenses of operation); interest received.*
- *Do not deduct tax, superannuation, health insurance etc.*
- *If you do not know the amounts accurately, please make an estimate.*

	Yourself		*Your spouse/partner*	
Under $5,000 per year ($96 per week)	☐	1	☐	1
$5,001-$10,000 per year ($97-$192 per week)	☐	2	☐	2
$10,001-$15,000 per year ($193-$288 per week)	☐	3	☐	3
$15,001-$20,000 per year ($289-$384 per week)	☐	4	☐	4
$20,001-$25,000 per year ($385-$480 per week)	☐	5	☐	5
$25,001-$30,000 per year ($481-$577 per week)	☐	6	☐	6
$30,001-$40,000 per year ($578-$769 per week)	☐	7	☐	7
$40,001-$50,000 per year ($770-$961 per week)	☐	8	☐	8
$50,001-$60,000 per year ($962-$1,153 per week)	☐	9	☐	9
Over $60,001 per year ($1,154 per week)	☐	10	☐	10

16. **Again at the time you first came to counselling, how many children did you have living with you, or living elsewhere? Leave the box blank if the answer is 'no children'.**

	Number of children living with you	*Number of children living elsewhere*
Your own children from the relationship you came to counselling about	☐	☐
Children from a previous relationship of yours	☐	☐
Children from a previous relationship of your partner	☐	☐
Other children, e.g. foster	☐	☐

17. Counselling can make a difference in people's lives. Thinking of your own marriage counselling experience, could you describe how counselling assisted you?

- *Circle the number that comes closest to how you feel. Please answer all items.*

How much has marriage counselling helped to?	A great deal	Somewhat	Not at all	Not a problem
Sort out your thoughts and feelings	4	3	2	1
Change yourself	4	3	2	1
Obtain support and understanding	4	3	2	1
Obtain specific advice on what to do	4	3	2	1
Make decisions about your life	4	3	2	1
Develop better personal relationships	4	3	2	1
Solve some personal problems	4	3	2	1
Learn some techniques to handle things more effectively	4	3	2	1
Gain confidence in yourself	4	3	2	1
Confide in someone who was outside your situation	4	3	2	1
Improve the relationship you were in	4	3	2	1
Prevent the relationship you were in from breaking down	4	3	2	1
Help to bring you back together again	4	3	2	1
Assist you with the separation process	4	3	2	1
Settle your differences	4	3	2	1
Improve the way you communicate	4	3	2	1
Help you handle conflicts	4	3	2	1
Understand what went wrong with the relationship	4	3	2	1
Understand better what was happening in the relationship	4	3	2	1
Understand your partner better	4	3	2	1
Bring about change in your partner	4	3	2	1
Enable your partner to see what he/she has done wrong	4	3	2	1
Enable you to see what you were doing wrong	4	3	2	1
Help your partner understand you better	4	3	2	1
Accept a situation you previously thought unacceptable	4	3	2	1
Bring things out in the open between you	4	3	2	1

18. Again, thinking of your marriage counselling experience, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- *Circle the number in the column that comes closest to how you feel.*

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Counselling brought up things I didn't want to talk about	1	2	3	4
Counselling made the relationship worse	1	2	3	4
Counselling upset me too much	1	2	3	4
Counselling did not solve the problems	1	2	3	4
Counselling helped our relationship but I'm not sure how	1	2	3	4
I am not sure what counselling did for me	1	2	3	4

19. Approximately how many times have you attended counselling sessions?

- *Please write the number of times in the appropriate box.*

Number of times together with your partner ☐

Number of times by yourself ☐

20. Would you have preferred to attend?

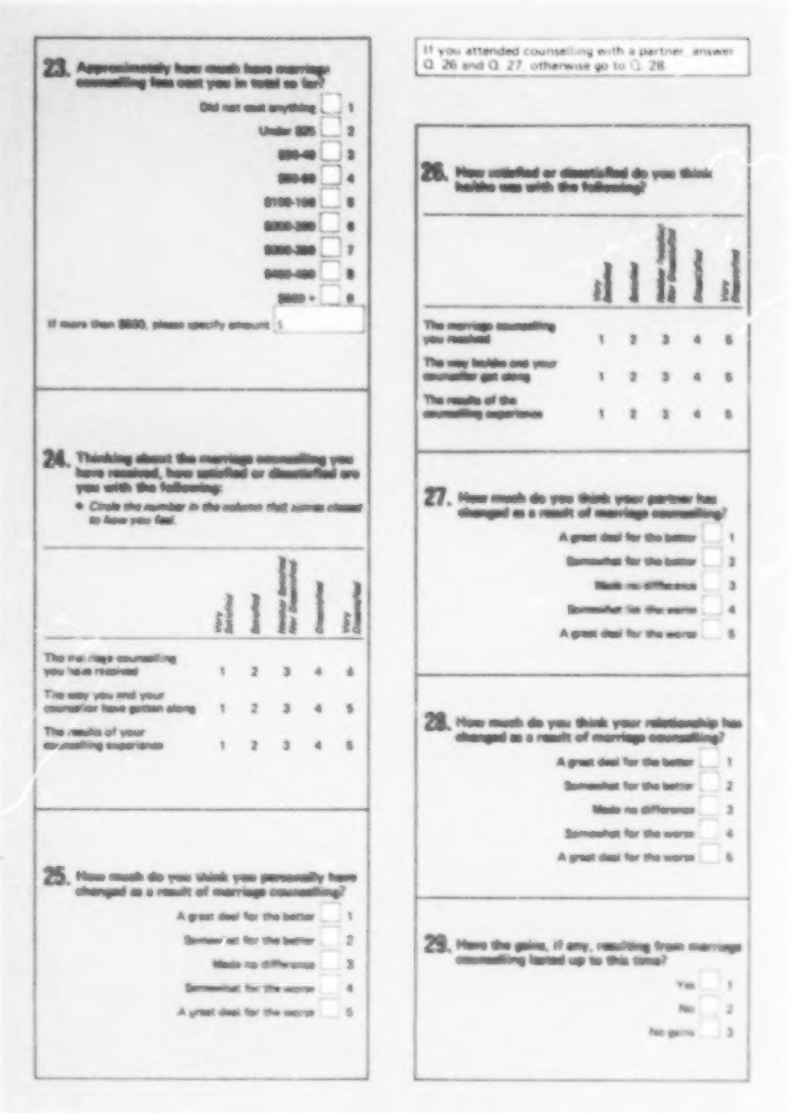
All sessions together ☐ 1
Some sessions together ☐ 2
All sessions by yourself ☐ 3

21. Are you still attending counselling?

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2

22. Approximately how much has each counselling session cost? Please write 0 if the service was free.

Cost per session ☐ $



23. **Approximately how much have marriage counselling fees cost you in total so far?**

Did not cost anything ☐ 1
Under $25 ☐ 2
$25-49 ☐ 3
$50-99 ☐ 4
$100-199 ☐ 5
$200-299 ☐ 6
$300-399 ☐ 7
$400-499 ☐ 8
$500 + ☐ 9

If more than $500, please specify amount $

24. **Thinking about the marriage counselling you have received, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following:**

- *Circle the number in the column that comes closest to how you feel.*

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
The marriage counselling you have received	1	2	3	4	5
The way you and your counsellor have gotten along	1	2	3	4	5
The results of your counselling experience	1	2	3	4	5

25. **How much do you think you personally have changed as a result of marriage counselling?**

A great deal for the better ☐ 1
Somewhat for the better ☐ 2
Made no difference ☐ 3
Somewhat for the worse ☐ 4
A great deal for the worse ☐ 5

If you attended counselling with a partner, answer Q. 26 and Q. 27, otherwise go to Q. 28

26. **How satisfied or dissatisfied do you think he/she was with the following?**

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
The marriage counselling you received	1	2	3	4	5
The way he/she and your counsellor got along	1	2	3	4	5
The results of the counselling experience	1	2	3	4	5

27. **How much do you think your partner has changed as a result of marriage counselling?**

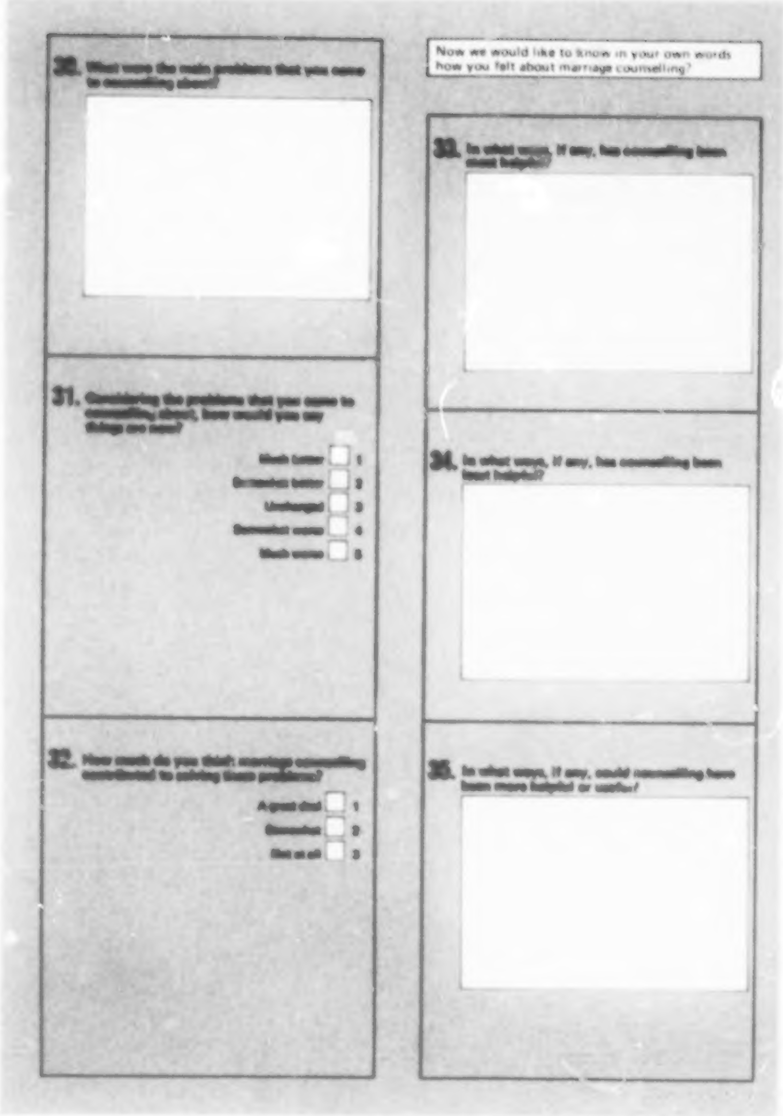
A great deal for the better ☐ 1
Somewhat for the better ☐ 2
Made no difference ☐ 3
Somewhat for the worse ☐ 4
A great deal for the worse ☐ 5

28. **How much do you think your relationship has changed as a result of marriage counselling?**

A great deal for the better ☐ 1
Somewhat for the better ☐ 2
Made no difference ☐ 3
Somewhat for the worse ☐ 4
A great deal for the worse ☐ 5

29. **Have the gains, if any, resulting from marriage counselling lasted up to this time?**

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2
No gains ☐ 3



30. What were the main problems that you came to counselling about?

31. Considering the problems that you came to counselling about, how would you say things are now?

Much better ☐ 1
Somewhat better ☐ 2
Unchanged ☐ 3
Somewhat worse ☐ 4
Much worse ☐ 5

32. How much do you think marriage counselling contributed to solving these problems?

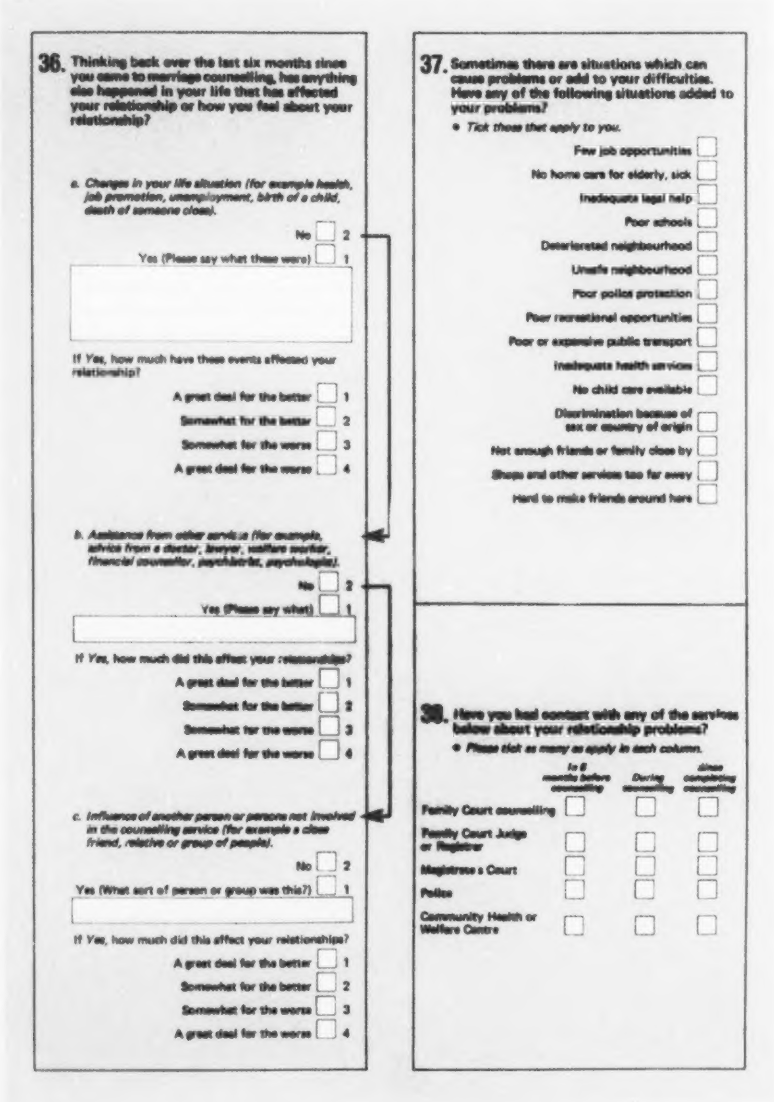
A great deal ☐ 1
Somewhat ☐ 2
Not at all ☐ 3

Now we would like to know in your own words how you felt about marriage counselling?

33. In what ways, if any, has counselling been most helpful?

34. In what ways, if any, has counselling been least helpful?

35. In what ways, if any, could counselling have been more helpful or useful?



36. Thinking back over the last six months since you came to marriage counselling, has anything else happened in your life that has affected your relationship or how you feel about your relationship?

a. Changes in your life situation (for example health, job promotion, unemployment, birth of a child, death of someone close).

No ☐ 2
Yes (Please say what these were) ☐ 1

If Yes, how much have these events affected your relationship?

A great deal for the better ☐ 1
Somewhat for the better ☐ 2
Somewhat for the worse ☐ 3
A great deal for the worse ☐ 4

b. Assistance from other services (for example, advice from a doctor, lawyer, welfare worker, financial counsellor, psychiatrist, psychologist).

No ☐ 2
Yes (Please say what) ☐ 1

If Yes, how much did this affect your relationships?

A great deal for the better ☐ 1
Somewhat for the better ☐ 2
Somewhat for the worse ☐ 3
A great deal for the worse ☐ 4

c. Influence of another person or persons not involved in the counselling service (for example a close friend, relative or group of people).

No ☐ 2
Yes (What sort of person or group was this?) ☐ 1

If Yes, how much did this affect your relationships?

A great deal for the better ☐ 1
Somewhat for the better ☐ 2
Somewhat for the worse ☐ 3
A great deal for the worse ☐ 4

37. Sometimes there are situations which can cause problems or add to your difficulties. Have any of the following situations added to your problems?

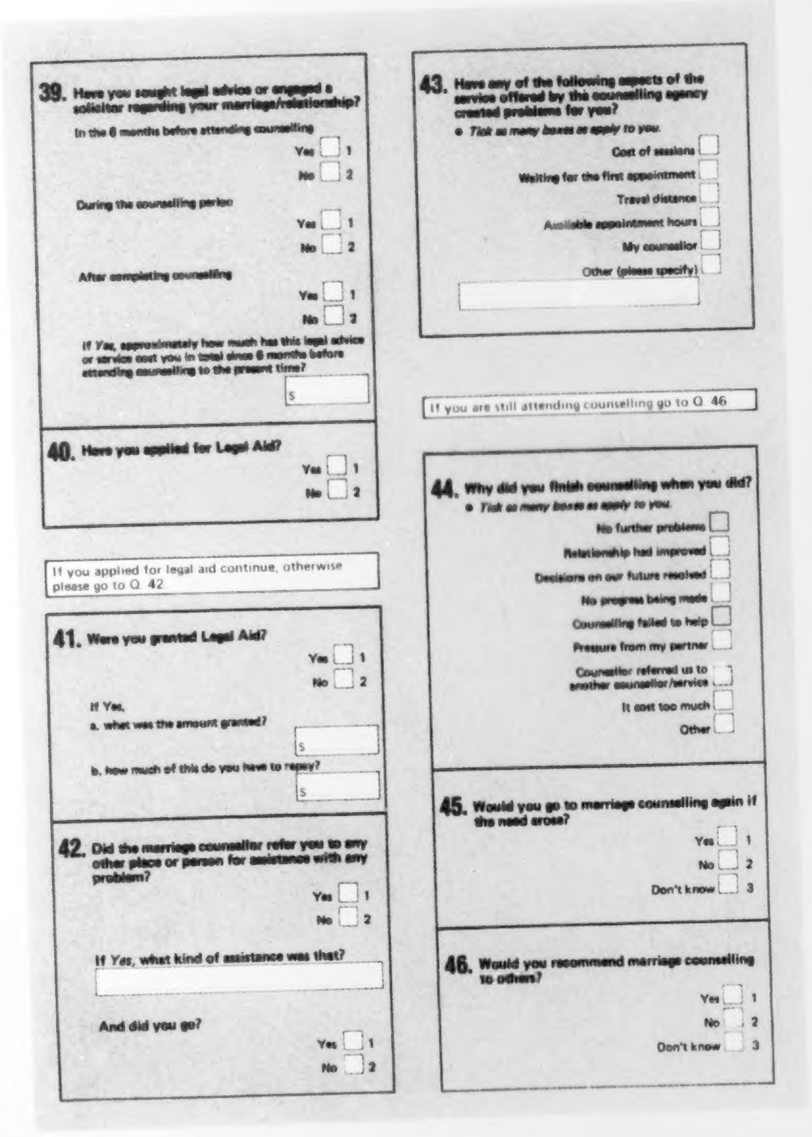
- *Tick those that apply to you.*

Few job opportunities ☐
No home care for elderly, sick ☐
Inadequate legal help ☐
Poor schools ☐
Deteriorated neighbourhood ☐
Unsafe neighbourhood ☐
Poor police protection ☐
Poor recreational opportunities ☐
Poor or expensive public transport ☐
Inadequate health services ☐
No child care available ☐
Discrimination because of sex or country of origin ☐
Not enough friends or family close by ☐
Shops and other services too far away ☐
Hard to make friends around here ☐

38. Have you had contact with any of the services below about your relationship problems?

- *Please tick as many as apply in each column.*

	In 6 months before counselling	*During counselling*	*Since completing counselling*
Family Court counselling	☐	☐	☐
Family Court Judge or Registrar	☐	☐	☐
Magistrate's Court	☐	☐	☐
Police	☐	☐	☐
Community Health or Welfare Centre	☐	☐	☐



39. Have you sought legal advice or engaged a solicitor regarding your marriage/relationship?

In the 6 months before attending counselling

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2

During the counselling period

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2

After completing counselling

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2

If *Yes*, approximately how much has this legal advice or service cost you in total since 6 months before attending counselling to the present time?

$

40. Have you applied for Legal Aid?

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2

If you applied for legal aid continue, otherwise please go to Q. 42

41. Were you granted Legal Aid?

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2

If Yes,
a. what was the amount granted? $
b. how much of this do you have to repay? $

42. Did the marriage counsellor refer you to any other place or person for assistance with any problem?

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2

If *Yes*, what kind of assistance was that?

And did you go?

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2

43. Have any of the following aspects of the service offered by the counselling agency created problems for you?

- *Tick as many boxes as apply to you.*

Cost of sessions ☐
Waiting for the first appointment ☐
Travel distance ☐
Available appointment hours ☐
My counsellor ☐
Other (please specify) ☐

If you are still attending counselling go to Q. 46

44. Why did you finish counselling when you did?

- *Tick as many boxes as apply to you.*

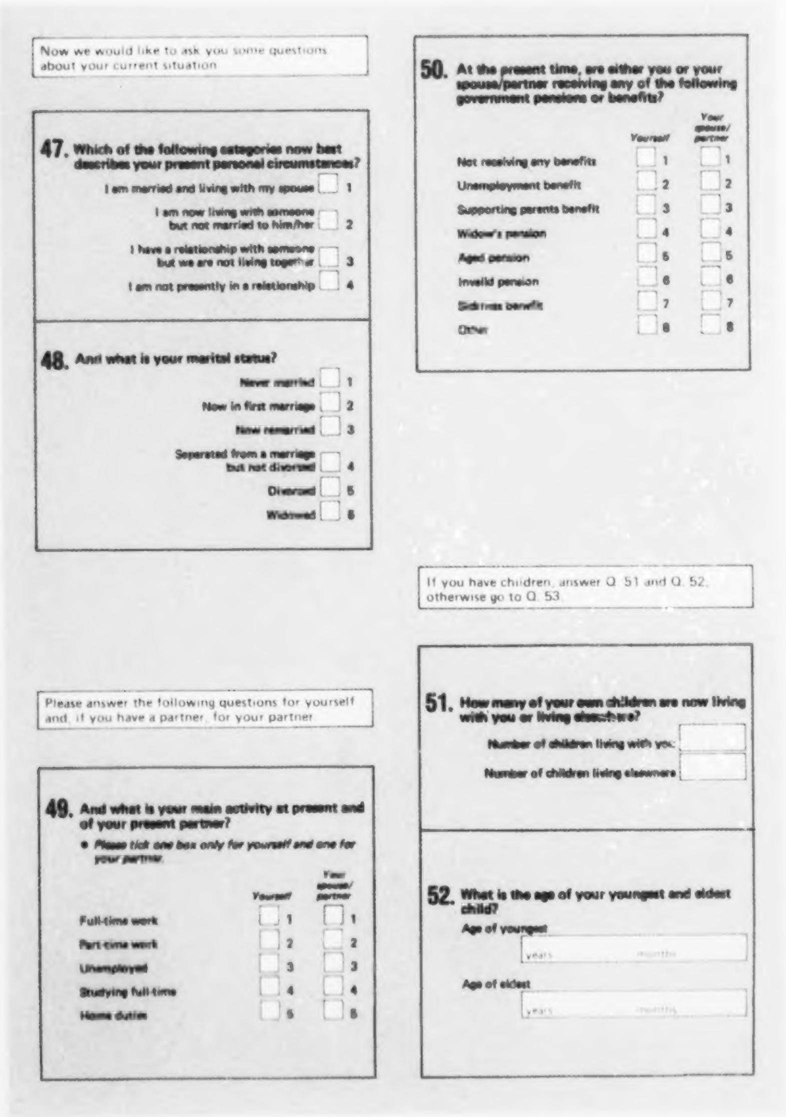
No further problems ☐
Relationship had improved ☐
Decisions on our future resolved ☐
No progress being made ☐
Counselling failed to help ☐
Pressure from my partner ☐
Counsellor referred us to another counsellor/service ☐
It cost too much ☐
Other ☐

45. Would you go to marriage counselling again if the need arose?

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2
Don't know ☐ 3

46. Would you recommend marriage counselling to others?

Yes ☐ 1
No ☐ 2
Don't know ☐ 3



Now we would like to ask you some questions about your current situation

47. Which of the following categories now best describes your present personal circumstances?

I am married and living with my spouse ☐ 1

I am now living with someone but not married to him/her ☐ 2

I have a relationship with someone but we are not living together ☐ 3

I am not presently in a relationship ☐ 4

48. And what is your marital status?

Never married ☐ 1

Now in first marriage ☐ 2

Now remarried ☐ 3

Separated from a marriage but not divorced ☐ 4

Divorced ☐ 5

Widowed ☐ 6

Please answer the following questions for yourself and, if you have a partner, for your partner

49. And what is your main activity at present and of your present partner?

- *Please tick one box only for yourself and one for your partner.*

	Yourself	Your spouse/ partner
Full-time work	☐ 1	☐ 1
Part-time work	☐ 2	☐ 2
Unemployed	☐ 3	☐ 3
Studying full-time	☐ 4	☐ 4
Home duties	☐ 5	☐ 5

50. At the present time, are either you or your spouse/partner receiving any of the following government pensions or benefits?

	Yourself	Your spouse/ partner
Not receiving any benefits	☐ 1	☐ 1
Unemployment benefit	☐ 2	☐ 2
Supporting parents benefit	☐ 3	☐ 3
Widow's pension	☐ 4	☐ 4
Aged pension	☐ 5	☐ 5
Invalid pension	☐ 6	☐ 6
Sickness benefit	☐ 7	☐ 7
Other	☐ 8	☐ 8

If you have children, answer Q. 51 and Q. 52, otherwise go to Q. 53.

51. How many of your own children are now living with you or living elsewhere?

Number of children living with you ☐

Number of children living elsewhere ☐

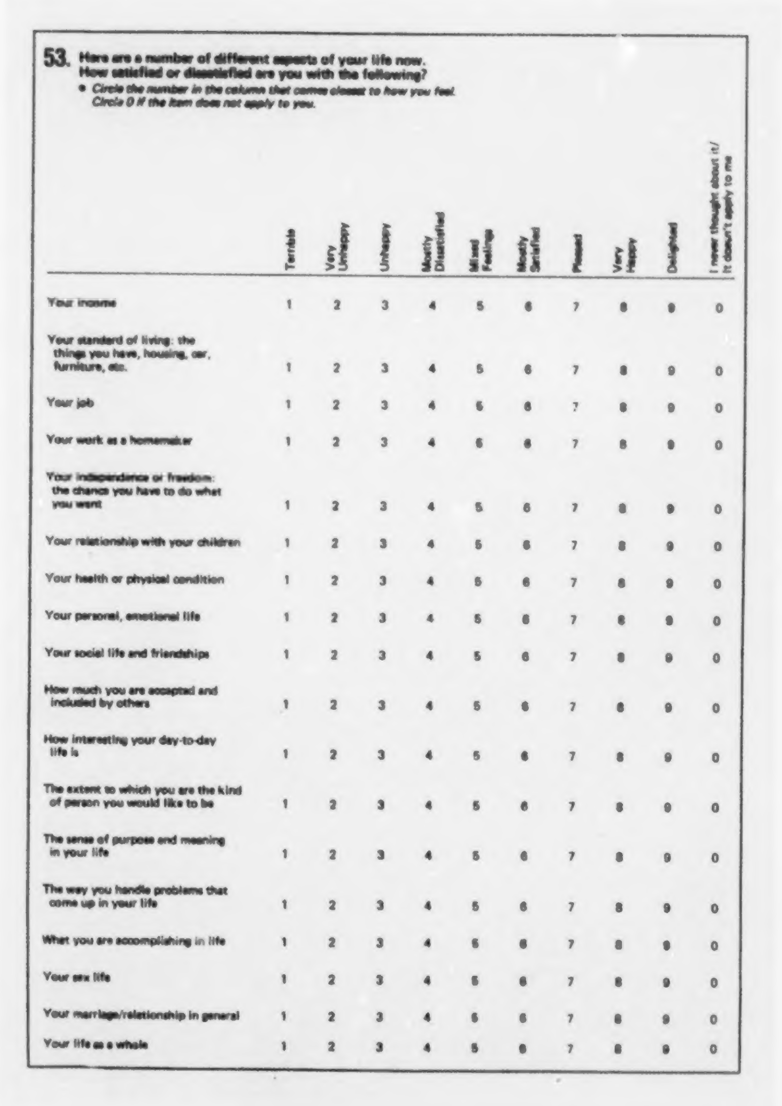
52. What is the age of your youngest and eldest child?

Age of youngest

years ______ months ______

Age of eldest

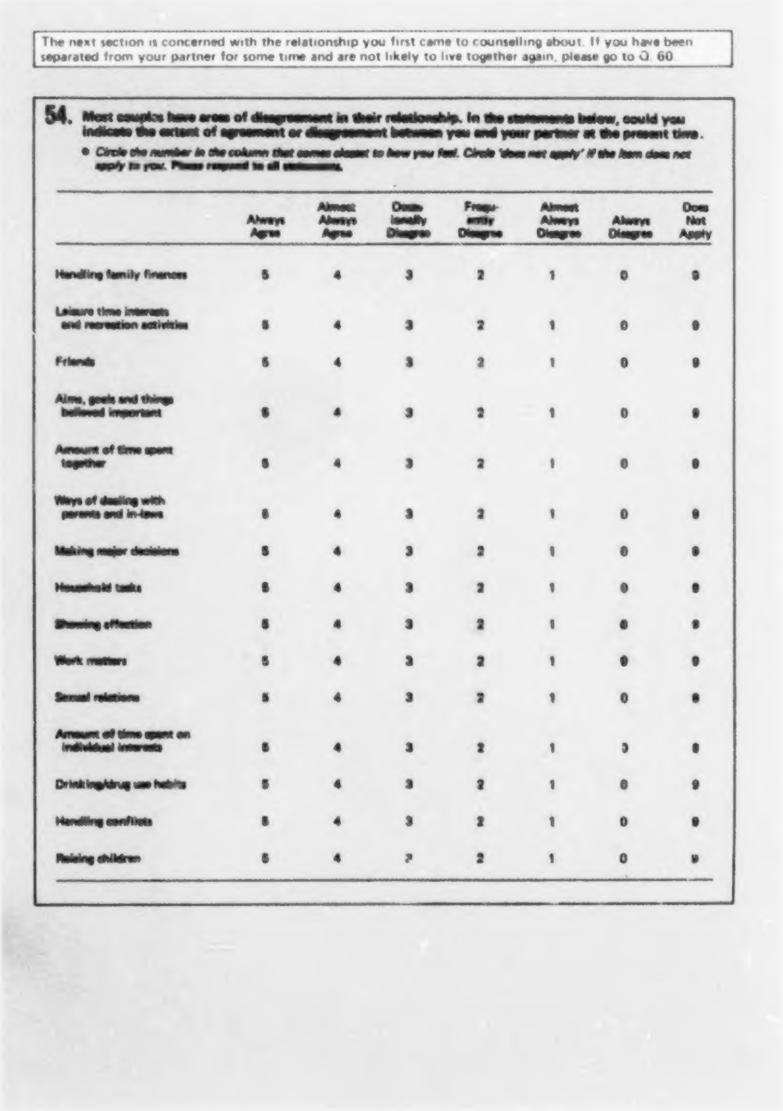
years ______ months ______



53. **Here are a number of different aspects of your life now. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?**

- *Circle the number in the column that comes closest to how you feel. Circle 0 if the item does not apply to you.*

	Terrible	Very Unhappy	Unhappy	Mostly Dissatisfied	Mixed Feelings	Mostly Satisfied	Pleased	Very Happy	Delighted	I never thought about it/ It doesn't apply to me
Your income	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your standard of living: the things you have, housing, car, furniture, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your work as a homemaker	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your independence or freedom: the chance you have to do what you want	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your relationship with your children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your health or physical condition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your personal, emotional life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your social life and friendships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
How much you are accepted and included by others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
How interesting your day-to-day life is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
The extent to which you are the kind of person you would like to be	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
The sense of purpose and meaning in your life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
The way you handle problems that come up in your life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
What you are accomplishing in life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your sex life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your marriage/relationship in general	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Your life as a whole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0



The next section is concerned with the relationship you first came to counselling about. If you have been separated from your partner for some time and are not likely to live together again, please go to Q. 60

54. Most couples have areas of disagreement in their relationship. In the statements below, could you indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner at the present time.

- ***Circle the number in the column that comes closest to how you feel. Circle 'does not apply' if the item does not apply to you. Please respond to all statements.***

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree	Does Not Apply
Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Leisure time interests and recreation activities	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Aims, goals and things believed important	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Ways of dealing with parents and in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Making major decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Household tasks	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Showing affection	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Work matters	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Sexual relations	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Amount of time spent on individual interests	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Drinking/drug use habits	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Handling conflicts	5	4	3	2	1	0	9
Raising children	5	4	3	2	1	0	9

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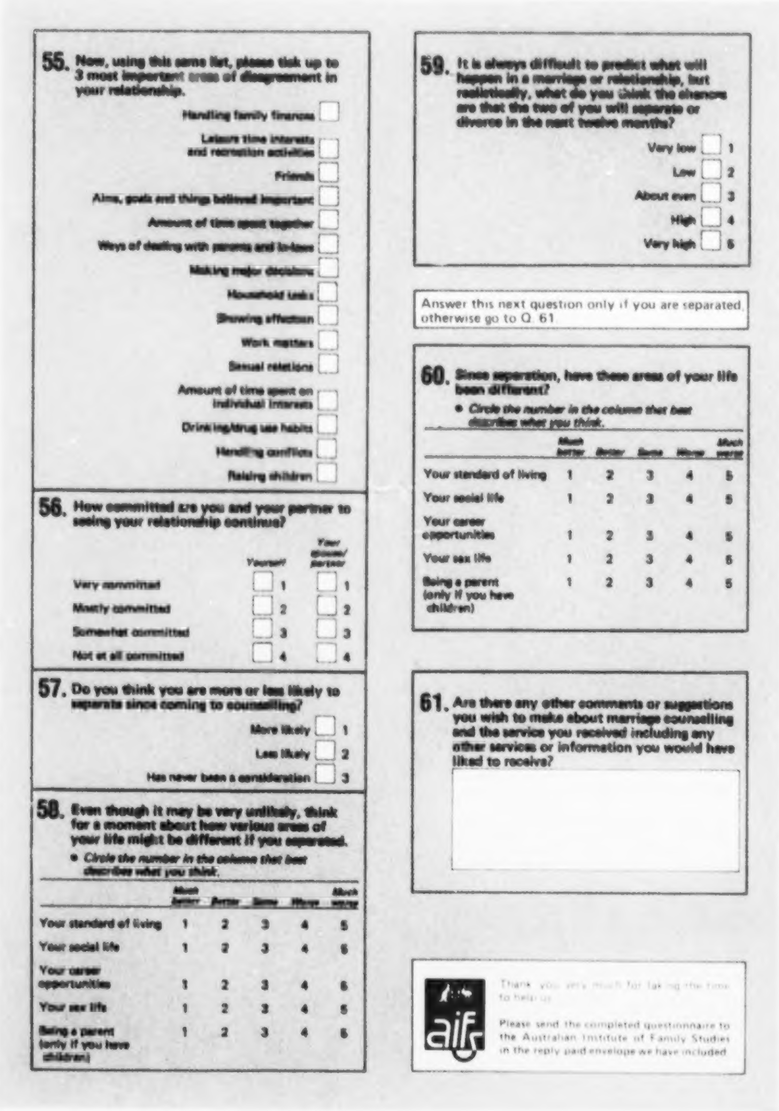

55. **Now, using this same list, please tick up to 3 most important areas of disagreement in your relationship.**

- Handling family finances ☐
- Leisure time interests and recreation activities ☐
- Friends ☐
- Aims, goals and things believed important ☐
- Amount of time spent together ☐
- Ways of dealing with parents and in-laws ☐
- Making major decisions ☐
- Household tasks ☐
- Showing affection ☐
- Work matters ☐
- Sexual relations ☐
- Amount of time spent on individual interests ☐
- Drinking/drug use habits ☐
- Handling conflicts ☐
- Raising children ☐

56. **How committed are you and your partner to seeing your relationship continue?**

	Yourself	*Your spouse/ partner*
Very committed	☐ 1	☐ 1
Mostly committed	☐ 2	☐ 2
Somewhat committed	☐ 3	☐ 3
Not at all committed	☐ 4	☐ 4

57. **Do you think you are more or less likely to separate since coming to counselling?**

- More likely ☐ 1
- Less likely ☐ 2
- Has never been a consideration ☐ 3

58. **Even though it may be very unlikely, think for a moment about how various areas of your life might be different if you separated.**

- *Circle the number in the column that best describes what you think.*

	Much better	*Better*	*Same*	*Worse*	*Much worse*
Your standard of living	1	2	3	4	5
Your social life	1	2	3	4	5
Your career opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Your sex life	1	2	3	4	5
Being a parent (only if you have children)	1	2	3	4	5

59. **It is always difficult to predict what will happen in a marriage or relationship, but realistically, what do you think the chances are that the two of you will separate or divorce in the next twelve months?**

- Very low ☐ 1
- Low ☐ 2
- About even ☐ 3
- High ☐ 4
- Very high ☐ 5

Answer this next question only if you are separated, otherwise go to Q. 61.

60. **Since separation, have these areas of your life been different?**

- *Circle the number in the column that best describes what you think.*

	Much better	*Better*	*Same*	*Worse*	*Much worse*
Your standard of living	1	2	3	4	5
Your social life	1	2	3	4	5
Your career opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Your sex life	1	2	3	4	5
Being a parent (only if you have children)	1	2	3	4	5

61. **Are there any other comments or suggestions you wish to make about marriage counselling and the service you received including any other services or information you would have liked to receive?**

Thank you very much for taking the time to help us.

Please send the completed questionnaire to the Australian Institute of Family Studies in the reply paid envelope we have included.

APPENDIX 2

SCALES USED IN MARRIAGE COUNSELLING SURVEY

Wellbeing Scale

Wellbeing Time 1 (n=534)
12 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .8767**
Wellbeing Time 1 (n=1302)
12 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .8712**
Wellbeing Time 2 (n=534)
12 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .9080**

Items

- Your income
- Your standard of living: the things you have: housing, car, furniture, etc.
- Your independence or freedom: the chance you have to do what you want
- Your health or physical condition
- Your personal, emotional life
- Your social life and friendships
- How much you are accepted and included by others
- How interesting your day-to-day life is
- The extent to which you are the kind of person you would like to be
- The sense of purpose and meaning in your life
- The way you handle problems that come up in your life
- What you are accomplishing in your life

Marital Consensus Scale

Marital Consensus Time 1 (n=534)
10 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .8317**
Marital Consensus Time 1 (n=1302)
10 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .8565**
Marital Consensus Time 2 (n=534)
10 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .8897**

Items

- Handling family finances
- Leisure time interests and recreation activities
- Friends
- Aims, goals and things believed important
- Amount of time spent together
- Making major decisions
- Household tasks
- Showing affection
- Amount of time spent on individual interests
- Handling conflicts

use format 21 here

Consequences of Relationship Breakdown Scale

Consequences Scale Time 1 (n=534)
4 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .6439**
Consequences Scale Time 1 (n=1302)
4 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .6626**
Consequences Scale Time 2 (n=534)
4 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .6812**

Items

- Your standard of living
- Your social life
- Your career opportunities
- Your sex life

Self-esteem Scale

Self-esteem Scale Time 1 (n=534)
5 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .8639**
Self-esteem Scale Time 1 (n=1302)
5 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .8467**
Self-esteem Scale Time 2 (n=534)
5 Item Scale **Alpha Reliability .9040**

Items

- How interesting your day-to-day life is
- The extent to which you are the kind of person you would like to be
- The sense of purpose and meaning in your life
- The way you handle problems that come up in your life
- What you are accomplishing in life

Marriage Counselling in Australia evaluates the effectiveness of counselling in assisting couples and individuals resolve those problems and concerns about their relationships which bring them to a marriage counselling agency. Differences between clients who benefitted most from counselling and those who were less helped are identified. The study explores clients' expectations of counselling, the ways in which they were assisted, and improvements achieved, both in their relationships and in their personal lives.

In this book, the Australian Institute of Family Studies has provided a readable, well-documented study of marriage counselling in Australia today which offers insights into the pathways and perceptions of men and women who seek assistance.

An Australian Institute of Family Studies Research Project

Australian Institute of Family Studies
300 Queen Street
Melbourne 3000 Victoria
Australia